

# THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER, 1894.

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## THE GREY MONK.

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DYKE."

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### CHAPTER XLVIII.

#### SIR GILBERT'S GREAT SURPRISE.

ON leaving his wife John Clare engaged a hansom and was driven direct to Gray's Inn Square. His object was to find Kirby Griggs and hear again from his lips the story which had already been told him by Everard Lisle. The lawyer's clerk was on the point of going out for his midday meal, so John secured him, and, taking him to a restaurant at which it was possible to engage a private room, he treated him to what Griggs later termed to his wife "a sumptuous repast," and did not let him go till he had drawn from him every scrap of information which bore in any way on the facts he was bent on investigating.

With the aid of the light which his wife's narrative had thrown on the affair, the mystery which had heretofore enshrouded the proceedings and conduct of Martha Griggs was in a great measure dispelled. There could be no doubt that when her mistress was seized with fever and taken to the hospital, the temptation to decamp with the latter's money and luggage had proved too potent for the woman's ill-balanced mind. Having once crossed the narrow boundary which divides honesty from its opposite, it was characteristic of her flighty disposition, surcharged with feminine vanity, that she should masquerade in her mistress's gowns and jewellery and pass herself off under a preposterous name culled from one of her favourite penny romances. What had been her intentions with regard to the disposal of the child after she should have reached England could not even be surmised. Her death, so sudden and unforeseen, had put an end to everything as far as she was concerned.

It would be a difficult matter to analyse John Clare's thoughts and feelings as he journeyed homeward after parting from Kirby Griggs. That which had been no more than a supposition when he left the Chase a few hours before, had now been converted into an indisputable fact. He was going back home to greet his new-found daughter, and that daughter was none other than she who had hitherto been known to the world as Ethel Thursby!

Now did he understand how it happened that from the first he had felt himself so unaccountably drawn towards her. He had read something in her face which had at once puzzled and attracted him; it had been to him like one of those faces which sometimes confront one in dreams, which one seems to know vaguely, but which utterly sets at defiance all one's efforts to endue it with a personality. But surmise and conjecture were at an end. She was his child—his own! He had proved it beyond the possibility of a doubt. So strange, so bewildering, and yet so wonderfully sweet did it seem, that for the time he was as a man walking in a phantasy.

Everard Lisle, on reaching London, had found Luigi Rispani and had obtained from him the address he subsequently gave John Clare, which enabled the latter to go direct to the boarding-house where his wife was staying.

Luigi was in doleful dumps. The bill for one hundred and twenty pounds, which bore the joint signatures of himself and his uncle, had fallen due, and the sum total which the pair of them could scrape together towards meeting it did not amount to much over thirty pounds. To make matters worse for the younger man, for the last few days Captain Verinder had been missing both from his lodgings and his usual haunts, nor did anyone seem to know what had become of him. But pity in such cases is but cold comfort, and he did not content himself with that. Before parting from Luigi he put into his hand a cheque for the full amount of the promissory note.

Everard Lisle's capital did not amount to much more than three hundred pounds in all, and was made up of a small legacy bequeathed him by a relative, supplemented by his own savings, for he had no extravagances and was of a thrifty disposition. To finish with this incident, it may be recorded that about a fortnight later John Clare asked Everard to be the bearer of a cheque for a hundred and twenty pounds from him to Luigi Rispani. He had been reading over for the second time the notes of the interview between Luigi and Sir Gilbert, after the former's release from the strong room, as transcribed by Everard from his shorthand memoranda, after which he had gone to his father and made certain representations to him, the outcome of which was the cheque in question.

Great was John Clare's surprise when told that the promissory note had already been met and by whom. He made no attempt to press the cheque on Everard, but quietly put it back into his pocket. He

would not spoil the aroma of a fine action by bringing it down to a cash level.

To return.

When Everard got back from London, bringing with him Mrs. Clare's address, he found that in the course of the afternoon Mrs. Forester had driven over from the Shrublands—the house at which Lady Pell had been visiting previous to coming to the Chase—and had insisted upon carrying Lady Pell and Miss Thursby back with her, with the understanding that they were not to return to Withington till the morrow.

Although he had not seen Ethel for a week, not since he had parted from her before setting out on that journey to America which had been stopped short at Liverpool, it was yet a secret relief to him to learn that, at the earliest, they could not meet for another day. And in twenty-four hours much might happen.

Everard Lisle was too clear-sighted not to perceive in what direction, when duly sifted, the evidence bearing on Ethel's parentage, which he had been enabled to bring together, all tended. As yet there was one big gap which required to be filled up, but it might well be that Mr. John Clare's investigations on the morrow would prove successful in bridging over the hiatus, or, in other words, in forging the last link in a chain of evidence which would then be complete and perfect in every part. Well, and what then? he asked himself. Should the foreshadowed end come to pass, ought he to be anything but glad, jubilant, happy? Certainly he ought to be all that and more, because in that case into his darling's life there would come a happiness greater and richer than her dreams had ever pictured.

And yet!—and yet!—There are two sides to every question, and when Everard thought of the other side to this one his heart grew faint within him. "I trust that I shall at least know how to do my duty," he said to himself with proud bitterness.

After his interview with Kirby Griggs, John Clare got back to the Chase in ample time for dinner. On leaving home in the morning he had merely told his father that a pressing matter of business would take him to London for a few hours, and Sir Gilbert had asked no questions. This evening father and son dined alone. A note from Lady Pell had come to hand in the course of the afternoon, stating that she had been persuaded into staying another day at The Shrublands, but that she and Miss Thursby would be back at the Chase without fail on the morrow.

John Clare kept his news to himself till dinner was over, and Trant had finally shut the dining-room door, leaving the two gentlemen over their dessert. John would not tell it before, fearing lest his father's mental excitement on hearing it might take away his appetite for the time, which, in view of all he had gone through of late, was not a desirable thing to do.

"Father, you would hardly guess where I have been to-day," he began, in as indifferent a tone as he could assume as he cracked and began to peel a walnut.

"I am a poor hand at guessing, Alec."

"I have been to London and have had a long interview with my wife."

"So!—Only some very strong motive, I should imagine, would have impelled you to seek such an interview."

"It would have been next to impossible to find a stronger motive—as you shall hear."

He finished peeling his walnut before he resumed.

"As the result of a vile conspiracy you had been led to believe that Luigi Rispani was your grandson. In the anonymous letter written by me, which was the first thing to open your eyes, you were informed that your grandchild was a girl and that she had died in infancy. Only the day before yesterday certain facts were brought to my knowledge which led me to doubt whether my daughter really had died when only a few months old, as I had been induced to believe, and whether, in point of fact, she might not still be living. It was the determination to get at the truth of the matter which led me to seek an interview with my wife."

He had spoken in studiously quiet tones, but already Sir Gilbert's hands were twitching with nervous excitement.

"Yes, Alec, yes. And the result of your interview?"

"Was to satisfy myself that my long-lost daughter is indeed still alive!"

For a little space Sir Gilbert sat staring straight before him in speechless astonishment. Not all in a moment could his mind take in and assimilate the amazing news which had just been told him.

"Have you fully assured yourself, Alec, of the truth of this?" he said at length. "That woman—— But I do not wish to speak further of her. Only, you know how she imposed upon me; may she not have done the same by you?"

John shook his head. "There is nothing to apprehend on that score. Not the least singular part of the affair is that till to-day she herself neither knew the whereabouts of the child, nor whether it was alive or dead."

"You surprise me more and more." He drew a deep breath. "Oh! Alec, does it, can it mean a daughter for you, and a grand-daughter for me?"

"That is what it means, father."

"And where is she? when shall I see her?"

"She will arrive at the Chase in the course of to-morrow."

"Arrive here to-morrow? So soon! Already my heart goes out to meet her. I long to see her, to embrace her."

"She is no stranger to you. You know her already."

"Alec, you trifle with me. I am an old man, and—and——"



"Father, I am not trifling with you. On such a subject I would not for the world. What I said just now is the truth. Your granddaughter, under the name of Ethel Thursby, is known and liked by you already."

"Ethel Thursby my granddaughter!"

"There cannot be a shadow of doubt about it."

As before, Sir Gilbert sat in speechless amazement, but this time, if such a thing were possible, his amazement was intensified a hundredfold.

"It is indeed a 'strange eventful history' that I have to narrate to you," resumed John Clare. "Would you rather that I put off telling it you till to-morrow, or——"

"Certainly not. There's no time like the time present. Now that you have told me so much you must tell me all. I shall not sleep a wink to-night unless you do."

Thus adjured, John Clare began the narrative with which the reader is acquainted.

Lady Pell and Ethel did not reach the Chase till after luncheon next day.

Over breakfast father and son agreed that it would be best to entrust her ladyship with the task of breaking to Ethel the news of her surprising change of fortune, whom they would see later on.

"It seems to me," said Sir Gilbert, "that we owe this discovery, in the first place, entirely to the efforts of young Lisle."

"That is undoubtedly so," replied John. "Had he not first moved in the affair, the chances are, nay, it is almost a certainty, that the truth would never have been brought to light."

"We owe him an immense debt of gratitude. In what way can we best contrive to repay at least a part of it?"

"As I understand the affair, he and Ethel are engaged to each other."

"True. For the moment the fact had escaped my memory. And yet it was only the other day that I congratulated the pair of them."

The two looked at each other for a few moments in silence.

"But the heiress of the House of Clare! One has a right to expect that she should make a very different match." It was Sir Gilbert who spoke.

"Very true. Still, it may be as well to bear in mind that but for Everard Lisle, the House of Clare would never have known that it had an heiress."

"Yes, yes; of course one can't forget that. As I remarked before, the debt is an immense one. But as regards this engagement, what do you advise?"

"Simply that for the present you and I do nothing at all in the affair, but wait and see how matters work themselves out between the young people."

"Um—um. One can pretty well guess the result of that."

"If Lisle is the man I take him to be, when he finds Ethel acknowledged as your granddaughter, one of his first acts will be to offer to release her from her engagement."

"Do you think so? Indeed, I shouldn't wonder if you are right. Lisle's a gentleman through and through, or else I was never more mistaken in my life. But in that case, what about the girl?"

John Clare smiled. "Being of the sex she is, who can foretell what she may choose to do, or not to do? But in any case, it appears to me that you and I must abide by the result, whatever it may be."

"I agree to that. Yes, yes, whatever the dear girl may choose to do shall be fully endorsed by us."

It seemed to John Clare, although he did not say so, that what Ethel would choose to do in such a contingency admitted of very little doubt. He felt intensely grateful to Everard Lisle, and he had already made up his mind that it should be owing to no fault of his if the young folk were not made happy.

Everard was not at the Chase this morning, it being his day for collecting the rents of sundry outlying farms, but he might be expected there in the course of the afternoon.

## CHAPTER XLIX.

### PAYMENT IN FULL.

It had been one of those softly brilliant days in late October, which sometimes come as if to haunt us with the ghost of the dead and gone summer. The sun had set in a golden haze, and the amber reaches of the upper sky were darkening slowly as the shades of advancing night crept upward from the east, when Ethel and Everard met face to face in the park.

Everard had collected his rents and seen to various other matters, and on his way to the Chase had called at the bank and paid in his day's receipts. At the Chase he had seen neither Sir Gilbert nor John, but as he had nothing special to see the Baronet about, he had contented himself with leaving a note for him on the library table, having reference to one or two matters in which his employer was specially interested. He was ignorant of the return of Lady Pell and Ethel from The Shrublands when he set off to walk across the park home.

Scarcely had Lady Pell had time to take off her bonnet and cloak on her return, before she received a message to the effect that Sir Gilbert would like to see her in the blue parlour at her earliest convenience, and there she presently found both the Baronet and his son.

Then to her in turn was unfolded the extraordinary story which had

been told by John to his father the night before, followed by a request that she would take upon herself the office of breaking the news to Ethel before either her father or grandfather should see the girl, which her ladyship willingly agreed to do.

Into the particulars either of that interview, or of the subsequent one between the astounded girl and the two men we need not enter. They must be left to the imagination of those readers who have followed our narrative thus far.

On one point only is it needful to give the details of what passed. It was after Lady Pell had broken her news and Ethel's bewildered faculties had recovered in part from the shock, that the latter said, "You have told me nothing about my mother, Lady Pell. Is she living or dead?"

So wholly unexpected was the question that for a few moments her ladyship was thoroughly nonplussed. Yet the question Ethel had asked was one natural to her sex and age. Whenever she had speculated about her unknown parents, or had indulged in day-dreams about them, her silent cry had been, "Mother, where are you? Mother, I want you!" It was not a father whom her heart had gone out in search of. So now, when told that the father from whom she had been separated when an infant in arms, had in some wonderful and as yet unexplained way found her again, the question anent her mother sprang involuntarily to her lips.

"I have told you all that I was commissioned to tell you, my dear, and beyond that my lips are sealed," replied her ladyship with an amount of hesitation quite unusual with her. "Of your mother I can tell you nothing, and if you will take my advice, you will ask no question about her of either your father or your grandfather. You may rely upon it that you will be told all it is requisite for you to know, and beyond that I feel sure that you will not seek to pry."

It is almost needless to state that at the ensuing interview the name of Giovanna Clare was not mentioned. Ethel was still left purposely in the dark as regarded all those points of her history with which her mother was concerned, for since John Clare could not have spoken of his wife to their daughter except in terms of the severest censure, he preferred not to speak of her at all. On one point, however, Ethel was quite clear, for her father had given her distinctly to understand that it was entirely due to Everard Lisle's efforts that they two had been brought together.

The moment the interview was over she had hurried to her room. Her eyes were dim with tears, but they were tears of happiness. She wanted to be alone—she wanted to sit quietly with shut eyes and try to realise the change which had come over her life within the last two hours. So strange and wonderful did it seem, that more than once she asked herself, in all seriousness, whether it was true that she was really awake and not the victim of some inexplicable hallucination.

As she stood before the window, she caught sight of Everard Lisle

crossing the park on his way to the Chase. He had left the dog-cart, which had taken him on his rounds, at Elm Lodge, not knowing how long he might be detained by Sir Gilbert.

Ethel's heart seemed to stop beating for a couple of seconds and then went on at express pace. She had not seen her lover for a whole week, and now that they were both back at the Chase what less than a fairy-tale was it that she had to pour into his ear? Hastily putting on her outdoor things she left the house by a side door, and crossing the park to a spot where five huge elms grew within touch of each other, there waited. Close by ran the narrow footpath which led from the Chase to a door in the boundary wall of the park of which Everard Lisle possessed a key, and three minutes' walk beyond which was Elm Lodge. It was by this footpath that he went to and from the Chase, and so saved himself a long detour by way of the main entrance to the park.

Not long had Ethel to wait. Presently she saw Everard in the distance, pacing along with downcast mien and eyes which seemed to see nothing, unless it were some inward pictures conjured up by his own fancy. As a rule his bearing was so resolute and self-assured, he fronted the world so confidently, that Ethel could not help being struck by the change.

Not till Everard was within a few yards of her did Ethel emerge from the umbrage of the trees and go slowly to meet him. He gave a great start the moment his eyes fell on her, and all his face lighted suddenly up as she had foretold it would. Three or four quick strides brought him to her side, and the same instant she was enfolded in his arms and strained close to his heart. Gently disengaging herself she said—

"Is this the way to treat an unprotected female? You ought really to try to get the better of your primitive instincts. Marriage by capture went out centuries ago. But, oh, Everard, I have so much to tell you!"

She took his arm and together they began to pace slowly to and fro in the shadow of the great trees.

"Do you know, sir, in whose company you are?" she playfully went on presently. "Do you know that she who is now speaking to you is Miss Clare of Withington Chase?"

Everard stopped dead.

"Then what I thought must be true has come true!" he said; and on the instant all the gladness died out of his face, and half his youth seemed to go with it.

But Ethel was not looking at him just then and saw nothing of the change.

"Yes," she resumed, "henceforth my name will be Ethel Thursby Clare. Only an hour ago I was told. I am no longer a waif, a nobody's child. The mystery of my birth is a mystery no longer. I have found a father, a grandfather, a home—though, thanks to my

dear aunts, I have never known the want of the last—and I owe them all to you—to you—to you!” As she spoke she faced him suddenly and gazed at him with deep love and devotion in her eyes.

“But do you not see, cannot you comprehend,” cried Everard in deep dejection, “how this change in your fortunes affects the whole position of affairs as between you and me? When I sought and won from you a promise to become my wife, I knew you only as Ethel Thursby, a portionless girl no higher in the social scale than myself. To-day I know you as the descendant of an old and honoured family, as the granddaughter of a man both proud and rich, who will naturally be justified in expecting that when Miss Clare marries it will be some person very different from one of his own salaried dependents.”

“When you took me for your promised wife, you did so with your eyes open, knowing me to be what I was—a nameless waif—and having no certainty that one day it might not be shown that I was the offspring of beggars, or worse. But did you allow that prospect to deter you in the least? You know well and I know well that you did not; and if it had been proved that I was the descendant of a family of thieves instead of the Clares of Withington, I have such faith in your love for me that I believe you would still have said: ‘I care not whose child you are; you are still my promised wife.’”

“In believing so you do me no more than justice.”

“Then perhaps you will be good enough to explain why the fact that Sir Gilbert Clare is my grandfather should modify or alter in any way the conditions of our engagement.”

“We need scarcely trouble ourselves with the why or the wherefore while the indubitable fact remains. The revelations of the last few hours have served to fix a great gulf between you and me. There is no option left me, none, but to release you from your promise, to give it back to you unconditionally.”

“Oh, how bitterly proud you are!” cried Ethel, her eyes flashing. “But supposing I refuse to be released, supposing I refuse to take back my promise, as I most assuredly do—what then?”

“In that case I can but lay it at your feet. When a prisoner’s fetters are knocked off he has no option in the matter; he is simply told that he is free. There is one point which neither you nor I should allow ourselves for one moment to forget. You can no longer claim to be your own mistress. Your duty and obedience are due to others. Those others will have views, wishes, prospects in connection with one so dear to them which you cannot afford to disregard.”

Ethel shook her head. “Obedience sometimes degenerates into weakness, and wrongs done either to oneself or others are none the less wrongs even if dignified with the name of duty. But I will say no more now, Everard. I see that it would be useless to argue with you. And I must hurry back, for I have long outstayed my time. When we next meet it will be my turn to triumph.” Her eyes

laughed up at her lover as he stooped and pressed his lips to hers. Then without pausing she flew towards the house.

Merely taking off her hat and jacket, Ethel went direct to the library, where she found both Sir Gilbert and her father, who had been on the point of going to their rooms to dress for dinner. They both welcomed her with a glad smile.

"I sent in search of you half-an-hour ago, but you were nowhere to be found," said the Baronet. "Where have you been hiding yourself? But come up to the fire. I can tell the wind has got round to the east again by the twinge in my left shoulder."

Seating herself on a hassock near the fire, Ethel spread out her hands between her face and the blaze. One of her father's hands lingered for a moment caressingly on her hair.

Although she did not in the least falter in her purpose, her heart was beating much faster than was common, and there was an odd little quaver in her voice when she spoke.

"I have been for a ramble in the park," she said, "and there I met Everard Lisle. Indeed, it was on purpose to meet him that I went, for we had not seen each other since before he set out on that journey which ended so unexpectedly at Liverpool."

"Um—um," murmured the Baronet.

"Then, of course, you had much to say to each other," remarked John Clare. "Doubtless Mr. Lisle was greatly surprised at what you had to tell him."

"I don't think it came upon him altogether as a surprise. Although he did not say so, I fancy he suspected the truth before."

"I have never found Lisle deficient in perspicacity," said Sir Gilbert as if speaking to himself.

"I hope neither of you has forgotten that I am Everard Lisle's promised wife," said Ethel with a little gasp, as her eyes glanced from one to the other and then were again averted.

"That is a fact which neither your grandfather nor I would be at all likely to forget," replied John, gravely.

There was a pause. Presently John reached forward and again laid his hand on her hair. "Darling, you have something more to tell us—I feel sure of it," he said very gently. "Speak. You have nothing to fear."

"Yes, I have something more to tell you. Everard insisted on giving me back my promise and that all should be at an end between us."

The eyes of the two men met across the figure of the crouching girl.

"Doubtless he had some more or less valid reason to urge for insisting that the engagement between you should be broken off." It was her father who spoke.

"Oh, he was quite explicit as to his reasons. I am no longer the nameless, portionless girl to whom he engaged himself, but the grand-



daughter of Sir Gilbert Clare of Withington Chase ; whereas, he is only Sir Gilbert Clare's dependent."

"I felt sure from the first that Lisle had all the instincts of a gentleman," interpolated the Baronet.

"Well, my dear, and what answer did you make this very self-willed young man?" queried John.

"I refused to take back my promise, and told him that whatever might be the alteration in my position and prospects I owed it wholly to him, but that as between him and me nothing whatever was changed."

"He had something to say to that, I have no doubt."

"He persisted in saying that all was at an end between us, and bade me remember that there were others whom I must now consider, and who have a right to expect the duty and obedience which is their due."

The Baronet nodded his head as one in thorough accord with the views thus enunciated.

"Yes—and then?" said John.

"Then I left him and came direct to you"—with a gesture that included both the men.

"You acted very rightly, my dear," remarked her grandfather.

"Both my father and I are fully conscious of our indebtedness to Mr. Lisle," said John. "And you may take my word that neither of us is disposed to undervalue it. But that is not the question before us just now. The points we are anxious to be satisfied upon are, that your happiness is really bound up with your engagement to Mr. Lisle ; that you feel inwardly assured not merely that you love him, but of the depth and sincerity of his affection for you, and finally, whether under all the circumstances of the case, it is not desirable that your engagement should remain in abeyance, say for six months, or even for three, with the view of proving at the end of that time whether you really do care for each other as much as you believe you do now."

"Dear father"—she spoke the words with a certain sweet shyness, which thrilled him as with a sense of exquisite music—"put us to whatever test may seem best to you. I have no fear for either Everard or myself. We will submit ourselves to you in every way!"

"Is that so?" said John with a smile and a lifting of his eyebrows.

"What, then, if I were to say, I will have no more of this engagement ; that it shall come to an end from this hour!"

"That is a question there is no need for me to answer, because I am quite sure you will never say anything of the kind!"

Sir Gilbert chuckled.

"You are no match for the young monkey, that's evident," he remarked. A second later he pulled the bell-rope that was within reach of his hand, and to the servant who came in, he said : "Order dinner to be put back half-an-hour, and then have word sent at once to Elm Lodge that I expect Mr. Lisle to dine here this evening!"

As the man left the room, Sir Gilbert turned to Ethel.

"There shall be no more talk of broken engagements, nor of putting you and your lover to the test. The debt which I and your father owe to Everard Lisle can only be paid in full by giving him our greatest treasure."

Ethel stood up, surprise, doubt, joy, wonder were all expressed in the look she bent on the old man.

"Oh, grandpapa, do you really mean it?" she gasped.

"Most really and truly I mean it!"

With a sudden impulse she seated herself on his knees and flung both her arms round his neck.

"You have made me the happiest girl in England," she murmured brokenly.

## CHAPTER L.

### THE VEILED STRANGER.

It was only to be expected that Ethel's thoughts should often revert to the conversation with Lady Pell, in the course of which the latter had advised her to ask no questions about her unknown mother at her forthcoming interview with her father and grandfather. It was advice which Ethel had accepted and abided by, but if she had hoped that some mention would be made of that which she so longed to know by one or other of those two who had so many wonderful revelations to make to her, then was she doomed to disappointment. Neither then nor later was the existence of any such person as her mother alluded to in her presence.

It was the only cloud on Ethel's happiness. If her mother were dead, why had she not been frankly told that such was the case? If she were still alive, could it be that all mention of her name had been purposely omitted because she had been guilty of something which must keep her and her daughter for ever apart? But when Ethel asked herself this question, which she did more than once, her thoughts at once reverted to that unknown Mrs. Clare about whom she had heard so much, while staying at the Shrublands, who was said to be the daughter-in-law of Sir Gilbert Clare, and to be an Italian by birth, who had lived for a short time at Maylings, but who seemed to have suddenly left the neighbourhood, for what reason Ethel had never been told, only a few days prior to the arrival of Lady Pell and herself at Withington Chase.

Then came another inevitable question. "Was Mrs. Clare of Maylings my mother?"

She had gathered from various remarks which Lady Pell had let drop from time to time, that Sir Gilbert had had four sons in all, but that only the eldest had lived to arrive at man's estate. If such were the case, and if the late tenant of Maylings were really Sir

Gilbert's daughter-in-law, then it seemed to follow as a certainty that she could be the wife of none other than John Alexander Clare—of the man whom she, Ethel, now knew to be her father!

It was a startling conclusion to come to, but, under the circumstances, none other seemed possible.

In accordance with the promise he had made Giovanna, and after consultation with his father, John Clare wrote to a London solicitor empowering him to wait upon Mrs. Clare and propose certain pecuniary arrangements for her acceptance. Return of post brought a reply to the effect that on inquiry at Mrs. Clare's lodgings it had been found that she was temporarily out of town and that the date of her return was uncertain. Evidently till she should have returned nothing further could be done in the matter.

But at this time John Clare's wife was much nearer him than he was aware of. The sudden appearance before her of the husband whom she had long believed to be dead, and the astounding news of which he was the bearer, had combined to produce in Giovanna's mind a feeling of bitter remorse, as regarded certain episodes of the past, to which she had heretofore been a stranger. To know that, as a consequence of her misdeeds, she had forfeited all a mother's rights and privileges, that her daughter would be taught to think of her either as of one dead, or, if as still living, as of one the mere mention of whose name was enough to bring the blush of shame to her cheek, was to drink deeply of the waters of Marah.

Her thoughts did not dwell much upon her husband; she had never greatly cared for him, and she experienced no particular wish, even had such a thing been possible, to be reconciled to him now. It was on the image of her unknown daughter—of her little brown-eyed Netta, stolen from her so long ago and now grown to woman's estate, that her mind perpetually dwelt. Her husband had not deigned to tell her what strange chance had brought him and their daughter together again, no more than he had condescended to enlighten her about the facts of his own history from the time of her desertion of him; but all that mattered nothing. The one fact that her daughter was alive, and, so to speak, within reach of her hand, was all that concerned her. And yet in this world they must never meet!

Yes, an hour's railway journey would have brought them together, and yet were they as widely severed as if a thousand leagues of ocean rolled between them. There was madness in the thought. Day and night it wrought in her brain. She could neither eat nor sleep except by fits and starts at wide-apart intervals. In a week's time she seemed to have aged half-a-dozen years. Her only visitor was Luigi Rispan. Sometimes she welcomed his coming and was grateful for his company; at others she wished him away that she might have more leisure to indulge in the long fits of silent brooding to which she was yielding up herself more day by day.

"Luigi *mio*," she said to him one day, "I want you to go down to Mapleford and make certain inquiries for me."

"Yes, aunt, with pleasure. What is it you wish me to ascertain?"

"I want you to pick up all the information you can about my daughter—where and how my husband found her, with whom she has been living all these years, and the name she has been passing under, together with any other particulars it may be possible to ascertain. If you can, I should like you to see her, so that you may be able to describe her to me. I would give fifty sovereigns this moment for a photograph of her. You have a number of acquaintances in Mapleford, and you ought to be able to bring quite a heap of information back with you. Here are a couple of pounds for your expenses."

Luigi pocketed the money with alacrity and departed. He turned over several plans in his mind for obtaining the information wanted by his aunt, and at length he decided that he would go down by an evening train on the morrow, alight at Westwood, the station this side of Mapleford, where there would be little risk of his being recognised, walk from there to Elm Lodge and seek an interview with Everard Lisle. The latter had already proved, in a way not one man out of a thousand would have done, how well disposed he was towards him, and surely he would scarcely refuse to furnish him with the required information. In any case, although the task was one he by no means relished, he would go to Lisle first of all, and get from him all that he was disposed to give.

But, by a curious chance, the need to do so was spared him.

The following afternoon as he was turning out of Tottenham-court Road into Oxford Street, whom should he run against but Miss Jennings, the pretty barmaid, the drinking of whose health on her birthday, not wisely but too often, had been the proximate cause of Luigi's getting into such disgrace with Sir Gilbert, since which occasion neither of them had seen anything of each other. Miss J., who was nothing if not self-possessed, at once stopped, smiled, and held out her hand.

"Why, Mr. Clare, of all people in the world, who would have thought of meeting you?" said the girl.

Luigi noticed with a flutter of gratification that she still addressed him as "Mr. Clare," but the fact was that she did not know him by any other name.

"You see, London is such a little village," he smilingly replied, "that we can't very well help coming across everybody in it that we know. But what brings you, Miss J., so far away from the snuggerly of the *King's Head*?"

Then it came out that the girl was about to be married, and had come to spend a short time with some relatives in London prior to that important event.

"Many things have happened down Mapleford way, Mr. Clare,"

she continued volubly ; "more especially at the Chase—even in the little time since you gave us the go-by without saying a word to anybody."

"And what has happened at the Chase?" queried Luigi, with a studied air of indifference.

"Law! haven't you heard? It's in everybody's mouth, how Sir Gilbert's son that was believed to have been killed years ago has come back home from foreign parts, and how since then the old gentleman has discovered his long-lost granddaughter. The young lady had been staying at the Chase for some time before Sir Gilbert discovered that she was his granddaughter. But most likely you know her, for she was there part of the time you were. The name she went by was Miss Ethel Thursby, and—— But I see that you know her," for Luigi had given a violent start.

"Ethel Thursby Sir Gilbert's granddaughter!" he exclaimed. "Are you sure of this, Miss J.?"

"Quite sure. As I said before, everybody is talking of it, but as to how it all came about nobody seems to rightly know. Down at Mapelford you'll hear half-a-dozen versions of the affair in as many hours, but in my opinion they are one and all no better than guess-work, and so long as the few people who know the truth choose to keep their mouths shut, which so far they seem to have done, guess-work they are likely to remain."

It was not till the afternoon of the following day that aunt and nephew met. Giovanna was intensely interested in all that Luigi had to tell her. She made him describe to her minutely what Ethel was like, and when she found that for a short time they had sojourned together under the same roof, she questioned him again and again about all the details relative to her with which his memory was stored.

Then there came over her an irresistible longing to see her daughter—just for once ; just for once to gaze into her eyes, and, if it were possible, to hear her speak. After that, she felt as if she should not greatly care what became of her. She had settled on no plan for the future. Whether she should remain, a lost unit, in the huge wilderness of London, or whether she should go back to Catanzaro, where there still lived some who were related to her, was just now a matter of no moment. She was consumed with a great thirst, and till that should be slaked nothing else mattered.

On the opposite side of the park of Withington Chase to that on which Mapelford is situated, in a pleasantly wooded hollow, nestles the obscure hamlet of Chadswell. Here in an old farmhouse a lady who gave the name of Mrs. Lucas and her nephew engaged apartments. It was an unusual time of year for anyone to seek country lodgings, seeing that November was now well advanced, but that was a matter for those who took the lodgings, and not for those who let them. The hamlet lies about half-a-mile beyond the precincts of the

Chase, and such of its inhabitants as are desirous of going to and fro between it and Mapleford on foot are in the habit of utilising a certain ancient right of way across the lower end of the park, which effects a considerable saving of distance, as compared with the high road, between the two places.

Aunt and nephew were of course none other than Giovanna and Luigi. The former had been brought to Chadswell by an inordinate longing to set eyes on her daughter (she could not have taken lodgings in Mapleford or its neighbourhood without running the risk of recognition, which, above all things, she was desirous of avoiding), and the latter had accompanied her at her special request. To Luigi the whole business was insufferably dull and wearisome.

Not till the short November days were closing in did Giovanna set foot outside her lodgings. Then, robed in black and thickly veiled, she made her way to the park, entering it by the stile made use of by the villagers; but instead of keeping to the public footpath, she turned sharply to the left in a straight line for the Hall. At such a season and such an hour there was no one to note her movements, and not till she reached the belt of shrubbery, intersected by numerous walks, which sheltered the house on two of its sides, did she deem it needful to exercise a little more circumspection. Luigi had given her to understand that Ethel was addicted to rambling about the grounds alone (in reality, he had known her too short a time to justify him in making any such statement), and her hope was that she might chance to encounter her while thus engaged.

And encounter her Giovanna did one dusky afternoon after she had been haunting the precincts of the Chase for more than a week. It was not in what was termed the shrubbery, but in the spinney that they met. News had been brought to the Hall that Dulcie Rigg was lying ill at the Tower, and after luncheon Ethel had walked across to inquire after the sick woman and make sure that she had all she needed. It was while on her way back that she came face to face with her mother.

Ethel could not help feeling somewhat startled when thus suddenly confronted by the figure of a tall stranger clothed from head to foot in funereal black. The stranger came to a halt full in front of her, and the path being of the narrowest Ethel could not but do the same. It seemed to her that through the interstices of the veil two eyes of a strangely penetrative quality were eagerly scanning every feature of her face.

"If I mistake not, you are Miss Ethel Clare, till lately known as Miss Ethel Thursby," said the veiled woman in a low rich voice, which yet had in it a tone that thrilled the girl, she knew not why.

"That is my name," replied Ethel with questioning eyes.

"I have come far to see you and speak with you," went on the other. "Not that I wish to detain you more than a very few minutes," she hastened to add. Then she paused, as hesitating



what to say next. "My excuse for seeking you out and accosting you," she presently resumed, "must be that many, very many years ago I knew your mother."

"Oh!" came in a low startled cry from Ethel's lips.

"You do not remember your mother?" said the stranger interrogatively.

Ethel shook her head sadly, while tears gathered in her eyes.

"I have heard something of your strange story, of how you and your father have been brought together again after having been separated for so long a time. But tell me this; does your father ever speak to you about your mother? nay, has he ever so much as mentioned her name in your presence?"

Ethel hesitated a moment, then she said proudly, "I am at a loss to know why you, a stranger, should put such questions to me."

The stranger sighed; to the girl it sounded like the sigh of an over-wrought heart.

"I do not ask them as one having a right to do so, but simply because I knew and loved your mother when she and I were young together, and because I remember you, an infant, lying in her arms."

"If my father does not speak to me of her," said Ethel softly, "it is probably because she is dead." Then with a little catch of her breath, she added, "But you, who were her friend, doubtless know far more about her than I can tell you; indeed, I can tell you nothing."

The stranger's bosom was rising and falling as if with some hardly suppressed emotion.

"Yes," she presently said, "I think my friend of long ago must be dead; not that I speak as one who knows; and it must be to spare your feelings that your father never mentions her name. But you will sometimes think of her with kindly affection, will you not?"

"Yes—yes—that I will not fail to do," said Ethel in a voice which was hardly more than a whisper.

"It is all you *can* do. And now I will detain you no longer. Let me kiss you once; don't refuse me that, and then I will go!"

As she spoke she lifted her veil, revealing to Ethel a countenance of noble proportions, but worn and white as that of one newly-risen from a bed of sickness, illumined by two eyes of midnight blackness, out of which there looked at her a soul so anguished and fraught with a sort of dumb despair, that the girl involuntarily recoiled a step. But only for an instant; the next both her hands went out to those of the other and she felt herself drawn forward, close—so close that she could feel the other's heart-beats against her bosom. Then the beautiful pallid face was bent to hers, and soft kisses, a dozen or more, such as those a mother bestows on her sleeping infant, were showered on the lips, the eyes and the brow of the astonished girl, interspersed with half-whispered exclamations in a language strange to Ethel, but which sounded far more soft and musical than her own.

Then suddenly she felt herself released—it was all over in a minute at the most—except that her hands were still imprisoned. For a space of some half-dozen seconds the stranger's eyes seemed to be drinking in her every lineament, as though she would fain fix them for ever in her memory. Then she suddenly lifted the girl's hands to her lips, imprinted on them two passionate kisses and dropped them abruptly.

"Farewell for ever," she said. "Remember me in your prayers."

As the last word left her lips, the veil fell like a shroud over the ivory-white face and anguished eyes, and almost before Ethel realised it she was alone.

It was late when Giovanna got back to her lodgings—so late that Luigi was becoming seriously uneasy about her. It had been raining heavily since seven o'clock, and when she did arrive her garments were saturated. She vouchsafed no explanation, and Luigi knew better than to ask her for any. But he could not help looking at her, for two large hectic spots burnt in her cheeks, and her eyes shone with a strange feverish light in which there was yet a far-away look as though her mind were elsewhere, and she was only half-conscious of the hour and her surroundings.

"Good gracious, aunt, you are wet through!" exclaimed Luigi after watching her for a few moments. "You will catch your death of cold."

She came to herself, as it were, with a start.

"It is nothing, I never take cold," she said. "All the same, I feel rather tired and will say good-night at once, if you don't mind. I am sorry if I have kept you up." Then laying a hand affectionately on his shoulder, she added: "I have seen her, Luigi *mio*, I have talked with her, my arms have held her, my lips have touched hers! I am very, very happy."

Next morning, when she failed to come down at her usual hour, Luigi sent the girl of the house to call her; but she was beyond the reach of any earthly voice. She had died in her sleep peacefully and without a sound.

"Disease of the heart of long standing, accelerated by cerebral excitement," was the verdict of Dr. Mallory.

## CHAPTER LI.

### SAFE IN PORT.

THE marriage of Everard Lisle and Ethel Thursby Clare did not take place till the following April.

Sir Gilbert, his son, his granddaughter and Lady Pell spent the winter in the South of France, where they were joined in February by

Everard on his return from Pineapple City, whither he had gone at John Clare's request (for Sir Gilbert strongly objected to his son's going in person) to wind up his affairs, which had been looked after during the past few months by a trusted subordinate, and to dispose of the business.

But it now becomes requisite to go back a little, for many things had happened before Sir Gilbert and the others got back to the Chase.

The first to whom our attention is due are the dear twin-sisters of Rose Mount.

On the morning of the day following that scene at the Chase when Sir Gilbert had unconditionally sanctioned the engagement of his granddaughter to Everard Lisle, Ethel asked her father whether he had any objection to her writing to her "aunts" at Mapleford and informing them of all the wonderful things which had befallen her in the course of the last four-and-twenty hours.

Not only had John Clare no objection to the sisters being informed, but he suggested that instead of Ethel writing to them, Everard Lisle should be sent to them as a special envoy, not only to tell them the news, but to bring them back, *vi et armis*, on a long visit to the Chase.

It was a task which Everard accomplished to the satisfaction of everyone concerned. Of the meeting between Ethel and the sisters, when at length the latter had been persuaded into accepting Sir Gilbert's hospitality, and of the genuine welcome accorded them, we have not space left to speak. It will be enough to say that, a little later, at Sir Gilbert's earnest persuasion, they agreed to leave Rose Mount and St. Oswyth's and make their future home at Maylings (of which they were to become the tenants at a nominal rent), where they would be next door, as one might say, to their "dear girl." That Tamsin should accompany them to their new home was a foregone conclusion; indeed, it would not have seemed like home without her.

John Clare's Christmas present to the sisters, to whom he felt himself so deeply indebted, took the form of a pony and basket carriage. It was a luxury which they had denied themselves ever since the break in their fortunes, but with Vale View House let on a seven years' lease the need for their doing so no longer existed.

In the course of the winter Mrs. Tew was married, the man of her choice being none other than Dr. Mallory, the most popular of the Mapleford *medicos*. As Lady Pell said, the affair was quite a little romance. It appeared that the canon's widow and the doctor had been in love with each other thirty years before when they were young folk living in quite a different part of the country. As is often the case, something had happened to separate them, and for a quarter of a century or more they had wholly lost touch of each other; so much so that for aught either of them knew the other might be dead.

Chance, or accident, one day brought them together, and to their mutual surprise they discovered that the ashes on the altar of their early love which they had believed to be long extinct, still smouldered, and needed nothing but propinquity and favouring circumstances to fan them into a flame which one might pretty safely assume would expire only with life itself.

If the canon's widow believed—which she did firmly—that Dr. Mallory had lived unmarried all these years because he had never got over his early disappointment, it was a charming belief, and certainly the doctor himself would have been the last man to undeceive her.

Little now remains to be done save to furnish the reader with a few brief particulars of the after fortunes of sundry of the characters with one or more episodes of whose life-history the foregoing pages have been concerned.

First, then, as regards the Keymers, father and son.

With Launce Keymer it was the case of the trickster being tricked. Always on the look-out for a woman with money, he met and was introduced to a widow, still young and pretty, whose husband had died two years before, leaving her a fortune of twenty-five thousand pounds. After having obtained a copy of the late Mr. Witley's will from Somerset House, and so satisfied himself as to the genuineness of the bequest, Keymer proposed and was accepted. Not till after his marriage did he discover that nearly the whole of his wife's fortune had been swallowed up in a huge banking failure which had occurred only a few weeks prior to his introduction to her. So extreme was his disgust and disappointment that, after having scraped together every shilling he could lay hands on, he quietly levanted, presumably to the land of the stars and stripes, and his newly married wife saw him no more.

Of Mr. Keymer, senior, it is enough to state that, partly as a consequence of his second wife's extravagance, which he was morally too weak to curb; partly owing to a growing neglect of his business, combined with, or the result of, an increasing fondness for the cup which, whether it cheers or no, *does* inebriate; and, lastly, because he found himself powerless to compete against the new brewery which a wealthy London syndicate had lately established in St. Oswyth's, he gradually drifted into the bankruptcy court, in the dreary morasses of which we will leave him floundering.

It was scarcely likely that Ethel, in her good fortune, should forget the existence of Miss Hetty Blair, the pretty nursery governess of Dulminster, who once on a time had rendered her such an important service. And when she heard that she was about to be married to a rising young lawyer of a distant town, a very substantial proof of her regard accompanied her wishes for her happiness and welfare.

Of Captain Verinder there is nothing pleasant to report. With such men as he it seems almost inevitable that as they advance in years their failings and vices should become accentuated, and that

whatever virtues or good qualities they may originally have been possessed of, should grow "finer by degrees and beautifully less." In point of fact, the Captain began to deteriorate and go down-hill from the date of the collapse of his vile plot. He had built so much on it that its failure thoroughly disheartened him, and afterwards he scarcely seemed to care what became of him. His end was a sad one even for such as he. His body was fished out of the river-ooze down Deptford way. An ugly wound at the back of his head and his turned-out pockets told unequivocally how he had come by his death.

Everything was done that could be done both by John Clare and Everard Lisle in the way of benefiting Luigi Rispani and furnishing him with the opportunity of earning an honourable livelihood, but to no purpose. By means of certain influence which was brought to bear, three different situations were obtained for him, not one of which he kept longer than a month or two. Simply to give him money from time to time was merely helping to demoralise him still further. At length a situation was found for him as drawing-master in a college of his mother's sunny clime, and though he would never reach fame or fortune, aware that he had now only his own endeavours to trust to, he managed to keep his head above water, and earn a very modest livelihood.

Kirby Griggs, to whom, in one sense, John Clare felt that he owed so much, was not forgotten by him. For the man himself he could do nothing, but he succeeded in placing two of his sons with excellent City firms, and, by finding the requisite premium, in having one of his daughters, who had a natural gift that way, apprenticed to one of the best-known milliners at the West End.

In the course of the winter the marble tablet, which had been put up in the church of St. Michael to the memory of John Alexander Clare, was quietly removed.

When at length Sir Gilbert got back to the Chase, it was declared by everybody who saw him that he seemed to have taken a fresh lease of life. And so indeed he had, for when a man's constitution has nothing radically amiss with it, happiness undoubtedly helps to lengthen our days, and Sir Gilbert had now everything to render him happy. The MS. of his County History, so long laid aside, was enthusiastically taken in hand again as soon as his grandson-in-law returned from his honeymoon, and in the course of the following winter was brought to a triumphant conclusion. The title-page records that it is the joint production of "Sir Gilbert Clare, Bart., and Everard Lisle Clare," for before the marriage took place Sir Gilbert insisted upon the young man taking out letters-patent authorising him to add to his own name the surname of the ancient and honourable family of which he was about to become a member.

During the years of his expatriation, John Clare had devoted much of his spare time to experimental physics. It is a study which exercises a potent charm over such of its votaries as venture beyond

the threshold of its temple of severe delights, and in the laboratory, which John caused to be fitted up at the Chase, he spent many happy hours in the effort to master those more abstruse secrets, and to arrive at a more correct knowledge of those subtler elements of the material universe, than the conditions of his life had heretofore allowed of his doing.

A few parting words are due to Lady Pell. As soon as the wedding was over she set out to pay a long-deferred round of visits, but by the middle of autumn she was back at the Chase, which henceforward was *de facto* her home. It was not to be expected that her restless proclivities would quite desert her, and occasionally she would start off at an hour's notice, or no notice at all, for some place a couple of hundred miles away, but always to come back with increasing satisfaction, as time went on, to the old roof-tree, under whose shadow the romance of her life had had its beginning and its end.

Of Ethel and Everard what can be said in conclusion save that theirs was the quiet happiness of well-ordered lives, of duties conscientiously performed, and of unselfish devotion to the well-being of others? In such a soil the sweet flower of content blooms perennially and changes not with the seasons as they come and go.

THE END.





## ALICE KING.

*The following simple account of herself by Alice King will derive an additional but sad interest from the fact that its author has passed into the Land beyond the veil. When she wrote it she had no idea that for her the Great Summons had gone forth, and that when it appeared she would no longer be present. Blind to all the glories of earth, she has entered upon all those greater glories which mortal eye hath not seen. To one whose mind was singularly responsive to all things pure and beautiful, the change can be only faintly imagined. To the writer of these few words she was a close and intimate friend for many years. For a quarter of a century her graceful pen has added its charm to the pages of the "Argosy"; but here, as elsewhere, her place will know her no more. Few people deprived of sight have lived so thorough a life, entering into all its enjoyments, social, intellectual, and even physical, in a manner that surprised and delighted those around her. That her life should have been cut short in its meridian, is an abiding sorrow to many who knew her best. Few possessed a more cultivated mind or more charming spirit. Much of this was due to her mental energy, her determination never to yield to her infirmity, her anxious desire that her life, in spite of its affliction, should not pass without yielding fruit. But that she was able to compass so much was also due to one whose whole life was given up to her; a sister who seldom left her side even for an hour; and to whose self-sacrificing effacement only the name of Ministering Spirit can be applied. Not less earnest and admirable than the life of Alice King was this never-ceasing devotion; and side by side with Alice King's name must ever be linked the name of her sister FRANCES.—C. W. W.*

**I**N West Somerset there is a beautiful tract of country bordered on one side by the Bristol Channel, and on the other by the sister-county of Devonshire. It is a land of heather-clad hills, sheltered valleys, the smaller of which are called in the language of the west-country "Combes;" a land of petulant, sparkling streams, where the wild red-deer browse and wander at will, now over the wilds of Exmoor, now in the thick woods; a land, the inhabitants of which in their characters, superstitions, and manners, and even their language, are in some respects a peculiar people, distinctly different from the rest of the peasantry of England.

Fifty years ago the characteristics of this corner of the west-country and its people were more strongly marked than they are now, when the steam-whistle, and the printing-press, and the schoolmaster had not found their way, and it was about this time when my scholarly

father, who had been a private pupil of Dr. Arnold, and my beautiful mother came to live at Cutcombe, a hill-country village, situated in the heart of the tract of the west-country I have just described.

Cutcombe is placed about 1000 feet above the sea-level, and Dunkery, the highest point in the West of England, is in the parish. There I was born, the youngest of four children, two sons and two daughters.

The Kings are a Yorkshire family, descended from John of Gaunt, from whom came the strawberry leaves in the ducal coronet seen in their crest. They have always been on the side of civil and religious liberty; one of them garrisoned the church of Kirby Malham in Yorkshire for the Parliament. My parents were cousins, and were both Kings. My paternal grandfather was the Vice-Chancellor of the county of Lancaster, my maternal grandfather was the Bishop of Rochester, one of the two bishops—the other being Bathurst, Bishop of Norwich—who laboured so nobly against overwhelming odds in the cause of Roman Catholic Emancipation. His wife, whose maiden name was Dawson, was a woman of much wit and of great personal attractions, and was the intimate friend of Edmund Burke.

My great-uncle, Captain James King, sailed with Captain Cook in his famous voyage round the world, and shared with him the glory of the discovery of the Sandwich Islands. When Cook was murdered Captain King took command of the expedition, and brought his vessels successfully back again into English waters. He was one of the most fascinating of men. Even Fanny Burney, accustomed as she was to the conversation of that age of brilliant talkers, owned and bowed to his spell, as she has recorded it in the pages of her diary.

I mention these circumstances connected with my family because they were an incentive to spur me on to get the better of the disadvantages of my blindness.

My sight was from the first extremely weak and imperfect; all the objects around me appeared to my childish eyes as objects in a mist. Gradually this faint gleam of sight faded away, and when I was seven years old I became entirely blind. This, however, did not in the least terrify or grieve me. Throughout my whole life my blindness has had this remarkable feature in it: I always have before my eyes a brilliant light, so that the whole air around me seems as it were incandescent; I appear to be walking in light. In this light I can call up at will all sorts of beautiful colours which I see mingled with the radiance, and forming part of it. Thus my blindness has always been for me in a certain way brightness.

As I grew older there came to me other abnormal peculiarities which have been mercifully sent as compensations. I can always tell when others are looking at me, and I can generally tell whether they are looking at me in kindness or the reverse. My sense of hearing is extremely sensitive, and through it I can read character in the tones of the voices of men and women round me. I can also discern character pretty accurately in the touch of the hand. I have certain

instincts for which I have no exact name, which sometimes make me foresee future events. My senses of touch and smell are excessively delicate ; the former gives me the keenest pleasure in flowers and in their different scents ; the latter is of much practical use to me. I can knit the finest silk in the most intricate stitches, and I have invented for myself a watch by which I can, by feeling, tell the time to a minute.

In childhood I did not have any special education on account of my blindness. I was instructed by my mother, who was a woman of much culture and of great natural ability. She taught me chiefly by heart and by my memory, which is very retentive and clear. I learned geography so thoroughly under her instruction that when I was a child I could describe with precision the position of any province in China or Tartary, or any country the most remote.

I was very fond of foreign languages from my earliest years, and I understand with more or less correctness seven tongues besides my own—French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. Some were taught me by my mother whilst I was a child, some I have learned with my sister since I was grown up. My father read aloud a good deal to my mother, and I was generally in the room, and took in part of what he read ; thus as a child I picked up in this way much miscellaneous knowledge. My youngest brother also read to me a great deal, chiefly poetry, and talked to me about what he read. I owe much of my education to the pains my father and he took in directing my reading, and talking to me about various subjects. I always think that girls should be in part taught by men ; it gives breadth and solidity to their character.

Our life in our retired west-country vicarage was more like a fragment of the old-world life of the last century than anything of to-day. We had few neighbours of our own rank, and our intercourse was chiefly among our village people, going in and out among them, and trying to up-lift and help them. It was thus that I gained that thorough knowledge of the west-country people, their characters, their manners and dialect, their superstitions and legends, which I have portrayed in so many of my stories and papers.

I spent much of my time out of doors in the free, bracing, hill-country air, well used to Exmoor rain and mist, for both came sweeping down pretty frequently upon us from the moor. In winter the roads were often, in a long frost, like glass for weeks at a time, so that we lived as in an enchanted palace cut off from the rest of the world. At night the wind from the moor would moan and sigh with a voice peculiar to itself, and would wake up all sorts of vague, weird fancies in an imaginative girl.

My parents accustomed me to the saddle from my earliest days, and I became a fearless horse-woman, and used to scamper over the hills dressed in their regal mantle of purple heather and golden gorse, and would ride merrily up and down paths that would be little less

than a nightmare dream to ladies and gentlemen who sail over the fields of the midland counties. I generally rode an Exmoor pony ; there were two of them to which I was especially attached, beautiful, spirited animals, called Hebe and Colly—the west-country word for a blackbird. They were both most inveterate shyers, and retained the habits contracted on Exmoor throughout their lives. Their tricky ways, and capricious starts and bounds, would have unseated many an experienced horse-woman ; but my ponies and I knew each other thoroughly, and I seldom, if ever, parted company with my saddle. The intelligent eyes of my favourites used to change their expression in a moment when I came to their side to mount. I have always had a great love for all animals : my dogs have been my most constant and truest companions. My especial pets have been black-and-tan toy-terriers ; two lie now in the vicarage garden, Sylph and Mimie ; and two are now frisking in my present home on the shore of the Bristol Channel, Chica, and Jack, the latter a Bedlington terrier.

I began to write poetry almost as soon as I could speak, and cannot remember the time when some of my thoughts and fancies did not run in rhyme. My father was engaged, when I was a child, in translating the *Æneid* of Virgil into English verse ; I used to sit on his knee while he was at work, and he would tell me the classic story, and all the personages in it would be as real to me as the people round me in my daily life. Then he would translate the Latin words into simple every-day English, and I would try to put them into rhyme, an exercise which helped to give me facility in language. My first appearance in print was when I was about ten ; I then wrote two hymns in a volume of religious poetry published by my father.

When I was just gliding from childhood into girlhood my parents took all their children to Italy for some months, thinking it would be a finishing chapter in our education. It was a wonderful opening of my mind, in spite of my blindness, and seemed to waken up all my imagination.

My first novel, 'Forest Keep,' was written when I was still a girl in my teens, and was published by Messrs. Hurst & Blackett ; other novels followed at various periods ; the most popular of which was 'Queen of Herself.'

I have all my life owed a debt of gratitude to many literary men for the helping hands which they have stretched out to me. Foremost among these I must mention Prof. Henry Morley. I became acquainted with him when I was a young girl, and he took the greatest pains in forming my literary style, in reading over what I wrote, and criticising it carefully. He would often make me re-write several chapters at a time, and would never suffer me to be content with mediocrity. He used to tell me that every word must fit into its place like the bits in a mosaic pavement. Charles Dickens also gave me much advice and encouragement, and did his best to bring

me before the public. Mrs. Henry Wood put her kind, strong hand into the hand of the young unknown authoress, and led her into her own literary path. The guild of literature is generally said to be jealous and slow with regard to the admission of new members, but I can personally testify to the reverse; there are names in literature that I can never mention without affection and gratitude. I have found literary men to be the most true, most loyal, most generous friends that ever trod; chivalrous, and reverent, and tender, alive to my infirmity and to my womanhood.

My literary work is all done by an American type-writer; I can write my MSS. as easily and quickly with it as a person with sight writes ordinarily with a pen, and my MSS. are, of course, much more legible than written MSS. usually are. I have made in my type-writer one or two improvements which would, I think, be found a useful addition in all type-writers for the blind. My sister, who is my constant companion, and most emphatically my second self, looks over all my MSS., and corrects them with her pen; she has always read to me so much and so constantly in different languages, and in books of all sorts, that I have never taken the trouble to learn the Braille character, which is now so much in use in all blind schools for both reading and writing.

All my time which was not filled up with literature was, during many years of my life, even when I was but a girl, occupied in teaching and influencing the working men and lads in my father's parish. I held every Sunday a large Bible-class for them; there were upwards of seventy members in it of all ages, from men of sixty down to boys of twelve. There were many married men, fathers of families, and father and son would often sit on the same bench side by side. I used to use verbal instruction only in my class, and I always went into the room without ever having prepared a subject beforehand. I talked to all my men and boys in private separately, and thoroughly looked into the character of each. I established for them by my own efforts a reading-room, a cricket-club, a brass band, etc. I had great influence over them, even over the roughest and wildest. My blindness seemed to rouse their chivalrous instincts, and to make them peculiarly susceptible to be up-raised and ruled by me; they appeared often to have an almost superstitious reverence for me, and I could frequently impress them and subdue them by a touch of the hand. Every Christmas I gave a large party for them and some of the members of their families, in which a large, brilliant Christmas-tree was one of the chief features, and in which were often danced those picturesque west-country dances of strange names and graceful antiquated figures, which no doubt were popular in the west-country in the days of Queen Bess and before then.

From speaking to my men's class I learned to speak in public. I used to address large meetings, and always spoke with facility and confidence. I never troubled myself much to elaborate my speech;

what I said appeared to come naturally, and, somehow, I always had incidents and illustrations at hand.

At my father's death, some five years ago, all my work in his parish was unavoidably given up. I had also then a nervous illness from which I have never quite recovered : my health does not allow me now to engage in work amongst working men and boys, and I am not able to speak in public.

I have always been very fond of music, and listening to good music has ever been one of my chief pleasures ; but for many years of my life I found no time to learn any instrument, and I did not acquire even the most rudimentary musical knowledge. During my illness, however, when I was not allowed to engage in any literary work, I resolved to fill up my time by learning some musical instrument ; so with my sister's help, who is a good musician, I mastered the first elements and then learned the guitar. My beautiful guitar is now my constant companion, and I can learn and retain by memory air after air and piece after piece ; it makes a charming accompaniment to the piano. I also acquired in that period of enforced literary idleness, the art of making macrame lace, and that of working with the needle on large canvas.

I have written this slight sketch of my life and work in the hope that it may help and rouse others to battle with similar disadvantages, and successfully overcome them.

ALICE KING.





## LUCY.

## I.

MRS. WEIGALL sat by the fire in her sitting-room, very neatly dressed and rather peevish-looking, as usual. At least it was her usual expression when alone with her family.

Outside, the wind and rain of early winter held sway, and the occasional lumbering past of a van or other vehicle hardly constituted a sufficient reason for looking out of the window. To look out of window on fine days was Mrs. Weigall's favourite occupation, and nothing went on in the village-street without her knowledge. But on wet days like the present she read the newspaper, and sat in judgment on her contemporaries, especially the more distinguished ones. Sometimes her remarks exasperated her eldest daughter Alice (the eldest by a second marriage and the eldest at home), and then Mrs. Weigall was rather promptly snubbed. For Alice kept the household in great order, being learned, a University Extension Lecturer and a journalist.

She was seated now at a little desk in a corner near the fire preparing her weekly article on current literature for the *Chillington Beacon*, which was a high-toned paper, enjoying a wide provincial circulation. Mrs. Weigall's consciousness of the scribe's presence betrayed itself in the furtive and guilty glances which she cast in the direction of the writing-table whenever the newspaper crackled obtrusively. Alice prided herself on having sacrificed privacy to the family convenience, and trained herself to write in the common sitting-room; but all the same the family were dreadfully afraid of making a noise whenever she was at work.

The sitting-room had folding doors opening into a smaller room that in its turn led through a French window into a pleasant garden. Pleasant even in cheerless winter weather, and charming on sunny days when every breath of air came laden with the scent of sweet, old-fashioned flowers and trailing rose-bushes: when the birds sang all day in the branches of the two large lime-trees, and the bees kept up their murmurous work throughout the drowsy summer hours.

In the cosiest corner of the inner room, between the fire and the warmly curtained window, a couch was drawn up, and on this lay the slender, delicate form of a young girl. Although over twenty, Lucy Weigall still looked almost a child. With her tiny hands and feet, her small, pale face, her golden head, she had an ethereal air which made strangers describe her as angelic. And she really was the good angel of the family. Round her couch dissensions were hushed; Alice grew less overbearing, Mrs. Weigall less captious

while as for Bernard, the only brother, he knew no hours so peaceful as those that he spent with the little sister, whose frail body his strong arms carried tenderly, and to whose thoughtful spirit he never turned in vain for sympathy or advice.

Lucy had a natural talent for sympathy, just as Alice had a natural talent for lecturing, and Mrs. Weigall a natural talent for wearing becoming caps, and for blossoming into importance when strangers appeared.

It was really wonderful how Mrs. Weigall had contrived to keep up the family credit through all the vicissitudes which she had experienced. When she first married Mr. Weigall, and came to live in Chillington, she had means and an assured position as the elegant well-bred wife of a solicitor, member of an old-established firm which enjoyed the confidence of the county families. Gradually, through the dishonesty of a partner, wealth had departed, Mr. Weigall died of a broken heart, and his family came to live in the village of Rushleigh, a few miles out of Chillington. On leaving school, Bernard obtained a post in the County Bank and went every day to his work by train from Rushleigh. Alice made money by her brains and her pen, while Mrs. Weigall, always neatly dressed and prepared for any social emergency, stayed at home to look after Lucy, to criticise her family and to turn a smiling face to visitors, especially such members of the county families as still recollected her existence.

Mrs. Weigall by her first marriage had one daughter, Mary, who was not at home.

For fifteen years indeed she had been a stranger to her family, having even ceased to write to them.

She was nearly grown up at the time when her mother, Mrs. Peyton, became Mrs. Weigall, and she deeply resented the step which gave her a stepfather, not that Mr. Weigall was unkind to her, nobody was unkind to her; but Mary enjoyed having a grievance.

When about twenty-one she had abruptly left home, and gone as governess with an English family to Yokohama.

For a little while she had written home, then her letters stopped, and when Mrs. Weigall wrote to Yokohama for information she could learn nothing. The consul to whom she had applied said that Mary's employer and his wife died of an epidemic and the children had gone home in charge of a governess. "Was not the governess Miss Peyton?" To this question of the consul Mrs. Weigall did not reply. She could not tolerate the idea that Mary had returned to England but failed to communicate the fact to her family; and to her visitors, such as occasionally asked after Mary, Mrs. Weigall always implied that her daughter was still in Japan. Of course she did not say this in so many words, but she never said the contrary, and this reticence sufficed for her purpose.

Two newspapers lay in Mrs. Weigall's lap; a London one which she had finished, and the local one, which she had just taken up

Hardly had she opened the letter than she made a little movement of surprise. She glanced at Alice. Yes, Alice was putting away her writing; Mrs. Weigall was free to speak.

"Lucy," she cried, "Miss Astley's nephew has written to the lawyers. He is coming home. He will be here in less than a month!"

The news was exciting evidently. Lucy looked up with a gentle gesture of interest. Even Alice rose and followed her mother, who had walked into the inner room.

"I must read you what the paper says," continued Mrs. Weigall, settling down by the invalid's couch. "Information which will assuredly give general pleasure has reached us. Astley Hall will soon be tenanted. Mr. William Astley, the heir, has written Messrs. Trigg and Smythe, the late Miss Astley's solicitors, to say that he may be expected home in about two weeks. Mr. Astley writes from San Francisco. He is an American born, but in the old country will soon we hope, etc."

"Well, that is some excitement in prospect, at any rate," said Mrs. Weigall. "After all, I am glad the place is to remain in the family."

"The family is quite a new one," remarked Alice.

"All families must have a beginning," replied her mother. "I wonder if Mr. William Astley is married. Oh, no; here is an additional paragraph. He is actually a bachelor."

"What a chance for our many maidens," said Lucy, with her soft laugh.

Mrs. Weigall glanced furtively at Alice, but Alice had never looked more like Minerva, learned and severely celibate.

"Miss Vandeleur," announced a servant from the outer room.

"Maud, you flower-scattering angel," exclaimed Lucy, as a pretty young girl advanced, her hands full of a lovely winter bouquet, deep gold and pale yellow chrysanthemums mixed with brown and russet leaves. "You need not tell me; I *know* all that glory is for me."

"Of course it is," replied Maud, bending over the couch to kiss her smiling friend. She also was smiling, and yet as the two girls' eyes met a curious flicker of sadness crossed the face of each.

"You have heard the news?" said Mrs. Weigall interrogatively when her guest was seated.

"That Mr. William Astley is alive and well and on his way home? Indeed, I have heard that, and I may say I came out to escape the spectacle of my poor father's disappointment. He is naturally grieved for me; far more than I am grieved for myself."

"Mr. Vandeleur disappointed?" exclaimed Mrs. Weigall in surprise. "And why?"

"You never heard then? It is true we thought it best not to say much on the subject as long as there was uncertainty, but now there is no need for reserve. Miss Astley left a codicil to her will to the effect that if her nephew proved to be dead without heirs I was to

inherit £20,000 of her property. You know she and my grandmother were great friends at school," said Maud.

"I know," replied Mrs. Weigall, "and I always used to wonder why she showed you so little kindness during her life. But there! She was not particularly kind to anybody, poor woman. Twenty thousand pounds! No wonder Major Vandeleur feels such a loss."

"But he chiefly feels it for me," said Maud hastily.

"Humph," remarked her hostess.

"And I feel it for him," the young girl continued.

"That I can quite believe," replied Mrs. Weigall. "Well, I wonder what Mr. William Astley will be like. I hope he will not resemble his first cousin, Robert, who was a scapegrace and no mistake. I have heard that he made one or two efforts to soften his aunt's heart towards him by penitent letters, but in vain. If he be still alive and hears of his cousin's good fortune, how angry he will feel!"

"Poor man!" said Lucy gently.

"As you pity everybody, you can pity him, my dear," observed Mrs. Weigall. "But I assure you that when he left the neighbourhood fifteen years ago in disgrace with his uncle and aunt, he did not seem to have one redeeming point. He was handsome and pleasant-mannered, that was what helped him to impose upon people. We used to see a great deal of him at one time. He was rather attentive to my daughter Mary. But I am thankful she never married such a profligate."

"I wonder if Mary will ever come home," said Alice.

"I do not believe she could stand the English climate after so many years' absence from it," answered Mrs. Weigall hastily.

"The climate of Japan is not good," argued Alice.

"It cannot be as bad as ours," retorted her mother.

Here Lucy, as usual, interposed, and finally, Alice, always busy, went out; and Mrs. Weigall being called off by some household duty, Lucy and Maud were alone.

"I grieve for the loss of that legacy," said the former, taking her friend's hand with tender sympathy. "I had never mentioned it, not even to mother or Alice, but I did always hope Mr. William Astley would not be found."

"I grieve too," said Maud bitterly. "I would not mind if father would allow me to exert myself, to go as governess or companion—anything. But he will not. And oh, Lucy! this life of hopeless poverty, and poor father's constant depression, they are so hard to bear."

Lucy found nothing to say in reply. She could only look the deep pity she felt.

## II.

WHEN Bernard came home to dinner, his mother of course lost no time in communicating to him the great news of the heir's impending return. He heard it in silence at the moment; but was no sooner alone with Lucy than he said abruptly:

"So Miss Vandeleur loses her legacy."

"Yes. Maud was here to-day. She feels the disappointment very much, but more for her father's sake than her own."

"I expect he is more crabbed than ever," said Bernard.

"And now you can never speak to Maud," murmured Lucy.

"I could not have spoken even if she had got the money," replied her brother. "Do you not see Major Vandeleur's expression at the presumption of a poor bank clerk in aspiring to *his* daughter's hand."

"But if Maud loves you?—and I am *sure* she does," said Lucy.

Bernard covered his face with his hands for a few moments in silence. "It is no use thinking about such things," he said at last. "You are a dear little confidante, Lucy, and I am glad you should know my secret, although I should hate anybody else to have possession of it. But you must help me to resign myself to the thought that Maud is out of my reach. I must just grind on through the same weary round. There is not likely to be any miraculous interposition of fate in my favour."

He ceased speaking on the entrance of Mrs. Weigall and Alice. They had brought their work, and requested Bernard to continue reading the book he had commenced the night before.

This was the usual evening programme—a routine which nothing seemed destined to disturb, and Bernard had just taken up the volume when there came a sharp pull at the door bell.

"That sounds important," observed Lucy.

"I daresay it is a telegram about those lectures," said Alice.

"It can hardly be a message from the bank," said Bernard.

The door of the outer room opened, a sable-clad figure came forward, paused an instant under the arch of the folding-doors, then advanced into the midst of the wondering group.

"Mother!" said the stranger and lifted her veil.

"Mary!"—with a cry that was almost a sob, Mrs. Weigall sprang forward and threw herself into her daughter's arms.

The astonishment of the others may be imagined. Bernard and Alice sprang up, came forward, kissed their half-sister, then glanced at her with a furtive wonder.

She turned towards the couch and bent over Lucy.

"You were five years old, I think, when I left—a bonny, golden-haired little thing. Why do you lie here? Are you ill?"

"I am always an invalid. But, Mary, I am so glad to see you."

"Of course, so am I," said Bernard heartily.

Alice stood silent, for shyness always made her awkward.

"Lucy was five, and Alice—this is Alice, I suppose—was ten, and Bernard twelve. And now to see you all grown up makes me realise what a long time I have been away." Mary wound up this speech with a short laugh, not a very mirthful one, and sank into a chair by the fire. She was quite composed. It was the others who were agitated, Mrs. Weigall especially.

"Let me look at you," she said, and taking her eldest daughter's face between both hands, tried to turn it towards the light. But Mary shrank back. "There is not much to look at," she replied shortly.

"There never was; and now I am grey-haired and wrinkled scarred by time and——" She left her sentence unfinished.

"You have come from Yokohama?" inquired Mrs. Weigall, sitting down beside her.

"I left Yokohama years ago. I come from America; from San Francisco. I give you all warning," added Mary, "that I have come home a failure. I am poor, and I am ill. Fate has beaten me."

It was characteristic of Mrs. Weigall that she asked no further personal questions.

"If you were in San Francisco," she observed briskly, "perhaps you know our coming neighbour, William Astley."

"William?"

"Yes, not Robert. You remember Robert?" smilingly continued Mrs. Weigall.

"Yes," Miss Peyton answered slowly. "I remember Robert."

"He turned out a dreadful character. I forget whether that was before you went away or after. Anyhow, he had to leave the neighbourhood in disgrace, and was disinherited by his uncle and aunt. Old Mr. Astley, who died ten years ago, left all his money to his sister, and she left it to Mr. William Astley, if he could be found, or failing that, to various charities and so on. Not a penny to Robert. William, you know, is another nephew, the son of a brother who went out to America after a dreadful quarrel with his family. Naturally no descendant of his would ever have been thought of as heir, had Robert only behaved better."

"And how has William been found?" inquired Mary, after rather a long pause.

"Messrs. Trigg and Smythe sent a confidential clerk to America to look for him. I suppose he is accompanying William home."

"No," said Bernard, "Mr. Trigg was at the Bank to-day, and he happened to mention that the messenger they sent out is dead, poor fellow! William Astley, who, by-the-bye, was not at San Francisco itself, but in some other Western city, could not come away at once, but took his passage for the middle of this month. The clerk was to have waited for him, but got a cablegram to say his wife was ill. He



started at once, and, strangely enough, died on the voyage of heart-disease. Nobody had even suspected that he was delicate."

"What a curious story!" remarked Alice. "Then there will be nobody to identify Mr. William Astley."

"Well, the clerk did that in America, you see," answered Bernard. "And he sent home a photograph of William, who seems to have the family type strongly marked although he wears a full beard. Do you remember how carefully clean-shaven old Mr. Astley always was?"

"Yes, and Robert—he never even adopted the then universal moustache," observed Mrs. Weigall; who added, turning to Mary: "I suppose you never saw or heard anything of Robert?"

"Did he go to America?" This counter-question was Mary's answer.

"Oh, not that I know of! I think I remember hearing that he went to Honolulu. But most bad characters turn up sometimes in San Francisco, do they not?" laughed Mrs. Weigall.

"I do not know," replied Mary coldly. She rose and, with a change of tone, continued: "I am tired. I suppose you can keep me here?"

This was not easy, for the Weigalls' small house possessed no spare room. Mrs. Weigall glanced in some embarrassment at Alice, but Alice dropped her eyes. Already her attitude expressed some hostility towards the new-comer.

"Mother usually sleeps in my room; but she can go into Alice's if you will take her place with me to-night," said Lucy, addressing Mary.

So it was arranged. But Lucy was a very light sleeper and she was awakened before midnight by a sound of stifled sobbing. Her first impulse was to speak: her next was to keep silence and not intrude upon a grief of which she did not know the source. But her gentle heart was strangely touched, and felt a yearning pity which translated itself into little tender words and ways towards the sombre half-sister who had so suddenly emerged from the distant unknown.

### III.

"OF course, you always make excuses for everybody, and I daresay there is something to say for Mary. But, Lucy, I cannot forget that her presence here throws an additional burden upon Bernard, and deprives you of many comforts which you ought to have."

The speaker was Alice, who was looking distressed and rather angry.

Mary had been three weeks at home now, and showed no intention either of going away again or of seeking to support herself. Always silent, always sombre, she gave no account of herself, beat back her mother's attempts at questioning, and showed affection only for Lucy.

Alice and Mary had been antagonistic from the first, and at last Alice's irritation found voice in the above-recorded words.

"I do not speak for myself," she continued. "Heaven knows that I grudge Mary neither food nor shelter, and if I were the bread-winner of the family I hope I should be as loth to make her feel unwelcome as Bernard is. But if she expects from him, as she evidently does, the charity of a brother, she should, at least, show him the confidence of a sister. She ought to explain herself. She ought to say why she has been away from us without giving a sign for so long; she ought to say why she has returned to our midst at last, and on what grounds she expects us—or rather Bernard—to provide her with the bread of idleness."

"Dear Alice," said Lucy, softly, "do you think there is really need for poor Mary to explain herself? To me she looks a thoroughly heart-broken woman. She said she had come back to us a failure. Who knows in what bitter struggles, in what crushing disappointments her hope, her courage, perhaps her health, have ebbed away?"

"She seems quite well," grumbled Alice, though her look had softened.

"That is what people sometimes say to me," answered Lucy, with a smile.

"You? Oh, Lucy, when anybody with two grains of perception can see that you have not the strength of a fly! I believe that you are kept alive by your sympathy with others. If you had nobody to pity, you would die to-morrow."

"You spoil me just as mother and Bernard do. But I feel the more grateful in your case because you spoil nobody else, and least of all yourself. But why will you be so indulgent to me, who have many to love me, and so harsh to Mary, who has nobody?"

"Is Alice saying hard things of me?" asked Mary, suddenly appearing in the opening of the folding-doors. She had entered the adjoining room unperceived, and now stood looking inquiringly from one to the other of her half-sisters.

They felt embarrassed, but Alice recovered herself and answered, briskly, "I was only saying, Mary, that I thought you ought to treat us with less reserve; to be franker with us about your past."

"My past?" Mary repeated the words like a mournful echo. She sank into a low arm-chair, folded her hands in her lap, and looked straight at Alice. "Question me," she said. "I will try to answer."

Alice's thick black brows met in an annoyed frown.

"I am not an inquisitor," she answered, curtly. "You ought not to need interrogation. You should tell us of your own accord why you stayed away so long; and why—well, yes—*why* you have returned so unexpectedly now."

"But you must not fancy that we are not happy to have you," interposed Lucy hastily.

"You are happy, of that I am sure," replied Mary, taking one of

Lucy's fragile little hands and holding it tightly clasped in her own. "I do not suppose Bernard or Alice is. Why should they be? I can only ask them to be patient with me. Perhaps one day I may find strength and courage enough to go out into the hard world again. But just now, I cannot, oh, I cannot!"

"And you shall not," cried Lucy, raising herself from her cushions and putting her arms round her half-sister's neck. "You shall stay here unquestioned, unharassed just as long as you like."

"But I ought not to be idle; I ought to earn my living," said Mary in the most hopeless tone in which such a declaration was ever made.

"We will think of something for you to do," replied Lucy. "I daresay I shall furnish occupation for you by falling ill and requiring to be nursed. If you nurse me you will save poor mother and Alice."

"I do not want you to be ill," said Mary with a tremulous smile.

But Lucy's words were prophetic. She fell ill the very next week and then Mary tended her with a loving devotion which won the gratitude of the entire family. Weeks passed before the young girl was able to lie on her couch in the sitting-room, and during the whole time Mary hardly left her.

When she was convalescent at last, a bleak and foggy January had slipped away to be followed by some weeks of mild weather which, in the country at all events, bore quite a smile of spring. Birds twittered in the leafless boughs, which had a beauty of their own as they shone golden brown against the translucent grey-blue sky. The pale yellow and lavender spikes of crocuses had pierced the earth in many gardens, and as one's foot brushed the stubble in the yet bare fields a lark sometimes sprang up carolling towards the boundless promise of the heavens.

"What matter that March with all its winds is ahead? The birds are wiser than we and enjoy themselves while they can, undisturbed by dismal prognostications," said Lucy, smiling up in Bernard's face, as he brought the chair in which he had wheeled her round the garden, to a standstill, and prepared to lift her out of it and carry her back to her couch. "Bernard, it is good of you to devote yourself to me this lovely Sunday morning. Any other man who had not gone to church would have betaken himself for a selfish walk and smoke, instead of stopping at home to look after a useless invalid sister. Do you see those lovely hot-house flowers? And do you know who sent them to me?"

"I know who sent them, and I think I know in whose hot-house they were gathered."

There was such an unwonted bitterness in Bernard's tone that Lucy looked at him in startled pain.

"Maud sent them. Bernard, what do you mean?"

"Of course, while shut up in your room all these weeks, little woman, you have not heard society's wheels go round."

"No, I have heard nothing. But has there been anything more

important than the usual penny readings?" Lucy spoke in a light tone, but she watched Bernard's face anxiously.

"Mr. Astley has arrived and been accepted by the neighbourhood as a great acquisition."

"And don't you like him?" asked Lucy quickly.

"To tell the truth, Lucy, I do not—and I should not like him," Bernard added in a lower tone, "even if people did not say that he is likely to marry Maud."

"Maud? I do not believe it. She would never be so mercenary."

"Mercenary, no. But, Lucy, she may like him. And you must remember"—Bernard paused a moment, then added with an effort—"that no hint at an engagement, no word of love has ever passed between Maud and me."

"But she must have seen that you loved her. And *I know* she loved you," said Lucy warmly.

Poor Bernard turned pale. It was poor consolation to hear this, now that he feared he might be losing Maud for ever.

"Think what the grinding poverty of her home has become!" he said at length. "And Major Vandeleur's perpetual laments must be very hard to bear. Unless she dislikes Astley—and most women, on the contrary, seem to like him—marriage with him probably presents itself in the light of a happy release."

Lucy sighed impatiently. Bernard was the soul of honour and generosity, but his warm-hearted little sister could not help wishing that he had been a little more impetuous and tried to win Maud in spite of poverty.

The conversation was interrupted by the return of Mrs. Weigall and her daughters from church. "Such excitement!" exclaimed the elder lady entering briskly. "The Vandeleurs and Mr. Astley were there. It is the first time he has ever been to our church, and coming with Maud. Oh! they *must* be engaged."

Bernard walked quietly out of the room, while Lucy, to divert attention from him, said: "Nobody has yet told me what Mr. Astley is like."

"Oh! a very nice-looking man, a thorough Astley, only he wears a full beard. Otherwise he reminds one very much of Robert, does he not, Mary?"

"Good gracious, Mary! what is the matter with you? You look as if you were going to faint!" The exclamation came from Alice, and directed general attention to Mary. She did indeed look deadly pale, her very lips were bloodless.

"It is nothing," she said in an odd, strained voice, but, instinctively as it seemed, as if for refuge, she drew near to Lucy, and sat down beside her couch.

"I noticed that you looked rather bad in church. And in the porch when I was going to introduce Mr. Astley to you, you walked away so suddenly, I felt sure you were feeling ill," remarked Mrs. Weigall.

"I do *not* feel ill. Why can you not believe me?" said Mary impatiently. More than this, nobody succeeded in extracting from her, not even Lucy, who yet divined that something had happened to intensify her half-sister's tragic gloom.

Meanwhile the neighbourhood was ringing with William Astley's triumphs; his hospitalities, his charm of manner, his interesting Transatlantic experiences. And the rumour of his engagement to Maud persisted, although the full confirmation of it was still lacking. From Maud herself no sign reached the Weigalls; even her visits to Lucy, formerly frequent, ceased, although she often sent flowers accompanied by a few loving words.

Rushleigh, headed by the vicar and his wife, was very busy getting up an entertainment in the school-house for objects connected with the Primrose League. There was to be a concert, a brief lecture on the Domestic Life of the Carthaginians, from Alice, and recitations from a well-known itinerant amateur. All the local talent was pressed into service, and the school-house echoed three or four times a week with rehearsals of songs, and duets, and choruses. Mary played well, and was consequently installed at the grand piano lent for the occasion by the munificent Mr. Astley. That gentleman had promised to grace the performance with his presence, and had undertaken to bring a large house-party of his own to swell the audience.

He had only been a few weeks at home, but he had already troops of friends, and among his guests was a very handsome girl, in whom the gossips of the neighbourhood saw a rival to Maud.

"If Miss Vandeleur keeps up her present show of indifference, she may lose him," said a visitor one day at Mrs. Weigall's, little guessing the throb of hope and exultation which she awoke in Lucy's heart.

"Surely Maud will not refuse him," said Mrs. Weigall.

"Hardly, I should think, considering Major Vandeleur's poverty and his unconcealed desire for the match. Probably Miss Vandeleur is only coquetting."

"Well, I suppose the entertainment to-morrow night promises to be a great success? Your daughter's aid will be invaluable, Mrs. Weigall."

"You are too kind," murmured the lady addressed. "But you remind me that the last rehearsal is to take place this afternoon, and Mary seems to be forgetting it. Ought you not to go, dear?"

Mrs. Weigall turned as she spoke towards Mary, who had been sitting silent, looking straight in front of her with the set, sombre look in her eyes which always, vaguely, made her family uneasy.

She roused herself at her mother's words, and moved wearily across the room, followed by the visitor's pitying, inquisitive glance.

"She looks suffering."

"Oh, she will recover! She is only a little overstrained," cheerily responded Mrs. Weigall with her society optimism.

The rehearsal in the school-house was over, and Mary, busy re-arranging her music, called out to the last-goer not to lock the door behind her.

Suddenly Maud Vandeleur, who had forgotten a shawl, came back to fetch it, and was closely followed by Bernard. The large room was only dimly lighted by the dying embers in the grate and by the soft diffused light of a crescent moon standing like a green sickle in a space of pearly-white sky, and visible with the stretch of quiet fields beneath it through the open door. Neither Maud nor Bernard noticed Mary, who had stooped in her dark corner to gather up some sheets of music.

"Miss Vandeleur—Maud," began Bernard in a voice of strong emotion, "we were children together and—and always friends. Forgive me if I seem indiscreet, but are you—are you intending to marry Mr. Astley?"

"What difference can that make to you?" asked Maud. Her tone sounded bitter and, perhaps aware of it, she added more gently—"to you, or to anybody outside my family?"

Mary had risen, but they were too agitated to notice her, and, perhaps embarrassed, she may have thought it better not to come forward.

"Alas! I know too well that I have no right to question you," replied Bernard, sadly. "What am I, poor and obscure, with no influence and no prospects, that I should try to control your destiny? But, Maud, if you were not the—if you were my sister, I would still urge you to prefer anxiety and poverty even to a marriage with William Astley. The man inspired me with an instinctive repulsion from the very first, and short as is the time since he arrived in the neighbourhood, I have heard things about him not to his credit."

"What things?"

"Nay, I cannot tell them to you," said Bernard. "You must take my word for it that they *are* said, and you must have faith enough in me to believe that I would not credit them lightly."

Maud gave a weary sigh. "I do not know how to act," she said dejectedly. "Father is always representing to me how good the marriage would be, not only for myself and him, but for the boys and little Trixie. Trixie is delicate; she wants so many things, and she never gets them. What would *you* say if you saw Lucy languishing for want of change of air? I am like the girl in 'Auld Robin Grey;' except," Maud added with rather a tremulous laugh, "that I have no Jamie to care what I do."

"Maud!" cried Bernard and seized her hands, then dropped them again instantly and turned away. There was a little silence, during which Maud hoped perhaps that he would say more; but he did not, and she turned towards the door at last with a suppressed gesture of discouragement.



"I—I will think over what you have said," she murmured hastily, and brushing past him stepped outside. He stood watching her as she walked away, then was preparing to follow when he felt a light touch on his arm.

"I was afraid of being shut in, or I would not have shown myself," said Mary.

"Then you overheard all we said?"

"Yes; but you can trust me, Bernard. I shall not repeat it."

That night, when Mary had finished bathing Lucy's aching brow with *eau de cologne*, she took the young girl's hand and said, in a curious, muffled voice: "Would it make you very happy to see Maud and Bernard married?"

Lucy opened her eyes in delighted astonishment.

"Happy? I should think so; but, Mary, how have you guessed their secret? You have seen them so little together; you must be a witch."

Then as Mary made no reply, Lucy resumed in a sadder tone:

"But there is no chance of the marriage. Bernard will never speak while he is poor, and he will be that until he is quite middle-aged—dear, kind Bernard. Ah, if Mr. William Astley had not existed, and Maud had inherited Miss Astley's legacy, then everything would have been so different."

Mary had taken one of Lucy's hands, and sat with it pressed against her cheek. All at once the young girl became aware that her sister was crying.

"Mary, what is it? Are you in trouble?" she exclaimed, distressed.

"I am always in trouble," Mary answered in husky tones. "It is a trouble that for fifteen long years now has haunted me night and day, draining my energy, sapping my hope, making me old before my time. I thought my heart was quite arid, that no flower of love or faith could ever bloom there again. I was so crushed and deadened that the present could offer, as I thought, nothing for which I should ever care to live. I dwelt only in the past—a cruel past. I was faithful to one memory; ah, such an unworthy one! And to that memory I should have been basely true, but for your sweetness, your loving-kindness, your beautiful courage. You have broken the bonds of my spirit, and set my trammelled soul free. You do not understand, but you shall soon. To-morrow, to-morrow, Lucy, I may still be miserable—I may be like the poor prisoner who has to learn to bear the sunlight—but you, the angel of my prison-house, you shall know that you have not lived in vain."

Mary bent over the bed and kissed her young sister fervently, passionately: then glided away, leaving the very darkness, as it seemed, still palpitating with her strange and solemn words.

The entertainment had gone off splendidly, and Mr. William Astley, quite the king of the occasion, was standing among the performers complimenting them severally and collectively.

His house-party, and Mr. Trigg, the Chillington lawyer, Major Vandeleur, the Vicar of Rushleigh and others were gathered in a smiling group beside or behind him, and, whenever they got the chance, re-echoed the great man's words.

"Charming, quite charming!" Mr. Astley repeated. "I do not know which performer to praise most. Your daughter, madam,"—with a bow to Mrs. Weigall—"sang delightfully, and all the accompaniments were beautifully played. By-the-bye, who and where is the pianist? I have not had the honour of being presented to her."

"Mary," cried Mrs. Weigall, "come forward, my love; come and let me introduce Mr. Astley to you."

"Robert Astley and I need no introduction," said Mary, suddenly emerging from behind the piano and moving into a clear space just in front of the guest of the evening.

That gentleman turned ghastly pale and stood with the bland smile frozen on his lips, while Mrs. Weigall, much disconcerted, exclaimed:

"My dear Mary, think of what you are saying. This is Mr. William Astley; it is nobody you ever saw before."

"I have seen him many times, and I know him only too well, for my misfortune, my bitter misfortune," answered Mary. "Ask him if he does not know me?" she continued in a louder key and raising her hand with a gesture of accusation. "Ask him if we did not meet fifteen years ago in Yokohama; if I did not follow him to San Francisco, lured on by his promise to marry me, if I did not discover just in time—ah, Heaven, just in time—that he was married already to the wretched girl whom many of you knew in the village here once as Ellen Bradley? Ask him if she be not still alive in San Francisco, hopelessly lost; his victim, yet still his wife. Ask him if he can deny all this. But no, there is no need to ask him. You can read the answer in his face."

"My dear young lady——" began the scandalised Mr. Trigg in horrified soothing tones, when he was interrupted by a harsh laugh from Mr. Astley.

"I do not see why we need stand here listening to the ravings of a lunatic," he said.

"My sister is no lunatic," interposed Bernard, firmly. "But certainly her charges cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. Mary, try to explain yourself calmly, at any rate."

"Well, I am not going to stand calmly here to hear myself further insulted," cried Mr. Astley, and moved towards the exit. But Mary threw herself in front of it and faced the man she had accused with blazing eyes. "You shall stay while I denounce you as an impostor and a thief!" she cried. "I once saw your cousin William, as you very well know. He was taller than you, thinner than you, and his hair and beard were fair—that could not be seen in the photograph—and by growing a beard you have contrived, I doubt not, to look

sufficiently like the photograph to deceive those who had never seen William. But you cannot deceive me. Where is William? What have you done with him? Let Mr. Trigg here send out another emissary to America to seek for William and to bring home your wife. Let——"

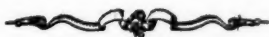
With a smothered exclamation Astley sprang forward, pushed Mary violently aside, and had wrenched open the door and rushed out before anyone could stop him. Several rustics who were in the seats near the door, rushed out after him, thus preventing his guests from following as quickly as they wished. When they did make their way out, it was only to find that Mr. Astley had apparently forgotten all about them, and had driven off alone.

"No wonder, poor man! To think of that mad woman being at large," said the guests, and Mr. Trigg, and several other people. For the opinion of the majority was in favour of Mr. Astley, and Mary received many hostile glances.

But Messrs Smythe and Trigg had a shock next day, when they found that their respected client had departed furtively by the earliest train. And the shock was intensified on their learning that in London he had promptly cashed a large cheque, and then disappeared. They sent a confidential clerk to America, and, after many months and infinite trouble, succeeded in unravelling the tangled skein of the strange story.

Robert and William Astley, already slightly acquainted, had met in San Francisco on the eve of the latter's departure for Europe. William, in the generosity of his newly found wealth, had offered to pay Robert's expenses and, as he expressed it, "bring him along." By a curious, a dramatic coincidence, William had suddenly died in the train on the way to New York, and Robert had been quick to see how easy it would be for him to personate his cousin. He carried out the idea with characteristic audacity, and as his wretched wife did not even know that he had left America, he counted confidently on escaping detection; and doubtless he would have done so, but for Mary's unexpected resolution to return home.

William's death once fairly proved, Maud came into her legacy, and shortly afterwards she married Bernard, to the great disgust of Major Vandeleur and the deep delight of Lucy.



## A CORNISH CHRISTMAS.

THERE is a wide breezy country in the far west whose lanes in summer are a paradise of blossom and fern ; the hedges don a royal mantle of honeysuckle, while giant fronds rise in tropical beauty by the roadside ; but the rarest and dearest are hidden like tiny emeralds in the mossy bank. There is no barrenness here ; that comes to us later when we have gained the hill-top and look-out over the silent, treeless land, where the rich hedges lose their brilliant detail and become merged in simple dark lines.

Turning into the lane again, there are forever glimpses of the wonderful sea stretching away—away—until it is one with the hazy blue sky ; or nearer, it fringes with white foam the endless chain of bays along the coast. Then, maybe, purple in the distance rises Tintagel, cloudy as some castle of romance, and over all there is such a mysterious stillness, such an absence of every-day life, that one hears without surprise the legends attached to each lonely farmstead, to every bay and tree ; for this strange vastness and silence are full of possibilities.

Such is Cornwall in summer ; in winter, giant storm-winds sweep the wide expanses ; the spirits are no longer kindly, but shriek fiercely on the blast or mock the unhappy sailors' cries as they drive them to death against the iron-bound coast ; a wild white sea dashes against Tintagel, and thunders deep in the rocky recesses, and the summit is lost in brooding clouds. Even the villages seem to nestle low under the cliffs or high green hills for protection and warmth in these terrible winters. Tregavan is an exception, however ; it looks boldly out to sea from its rocky height, braving the Atlantic storms which have left their traces on the ancient weather-beaten church, the highest point for miles in the surrounding country. The grave-stones, too, are defaced and somewhat disorderly, as though they had been blown about in "dirty" weather, but the oldest bear the names of families still existing in Tregavan, and there is a link of relationship running through all. There is a sad unanimity, too, in the record of the drowned sailors—here and there a cross over the body of a stranger washed ashore—while the sea-captains, with a due regard to discipline, even in eternity, usurp all the more imposing monuments. The best of these as well as the most recent, however, stands within, below the east window, setting forth that it is to the memory of those lost in the *Belle Marie*, Christmas Day, 1877, and the painted window above was also "given in gratitude to God by Leon Lamont, captain and sole survivor."

The stern skies are tempered by the mellow glass, and the golden lights fall in a glory on the head of Thirsa Mitchell, who sits below.

She has taken off her wet hood, and her dark young head is uncovered ; it is small and well-set with a singular proud grace, but the face is too grave, almost sad, for a young woman of twenty. Her bare hands are well formed and small ; though they bear all the signs of hard toil, they are brown and strengthened, not coarsened by labour. A wedding-ring gleams on her finger ; she has soft dark eyes, but these you cannot see, her head is bent down, for a baby lies sleeping on her breast.

They are the poorest members of this poor congregation, but none is more attentive than the young mother, though it may be questioned if she understands much of all she hears ; but her eyes, full of faith, never stray from the clergyman, unless the baby stirs or raises his plump brown fist, when she hushes him gently. They are a strange pair, the mother so young and grave, and the baby so still ; even when awake he behaves with a curious sense of propriety, as if there were nothing unusual in so youthful a Christian attending service on a bitter Christmas morning.

At last it is all over, the scanty congregation files out, and while the shivering clergyman dons his thick coat in the vestry, Thirsa stands in the porch with her baby well rolled up in her warm shawl, and here she will wait, as usual, for Mr. Tressilis's greeting—the only one she will probably obtain to-day—for the little world of Tregavan looks coldly on Thirsa of late.

"Good morning, Thirsa ! How is Master Leon ?"

"Bravely, sir, thank you !"—proudly disengaging a sturdy hand from the shawl and holding it out.

"Ah, he's a fine fellow indeed ! A bitter morning, Thirsa ; you had better come up to the Rectory to dine. Mrs. Bate will be glad to see you."

Thirsa shook her head and murmured some thanks, but still she lingered.

"Any news yet, Thirsa ?"

"Not yet, sir," she said, looking up with a faint smile ; and as if she had only waited for this she bade the gentleman "Good morning" and went swiftly up the rocky road.

The Rev. John Tressilis turned homeward with his friend, an old college chum of years since, who still came from the warmth and ease of London life to spend each Christmas in Cornwall, and was wont to say it was the severest test of friendship the present age afforded.

"Poor Thirsa ! I doubt if she would leave before I asked her for any news. She has waited all the week for that solitary bit of comfort, Anstey. I am afraid she has walked up here chiefly for that," he added. "Still, she is a good girl ; it is worth all my life down here to have saved her."

"How did you save her, Tressilis ? From what ?"

"I believed her," he replied, simply. "I believed her, when no one else did, and I saved her from despair, which murders souls !"

The Rector's "womenkind" were represented only by his old house-keeper and two maids, so after a six-o'clock dinner the two bachelors settled down in their respective easy-chairs before a glowing wood fire in the homely library, and after recalling mutual old stories, and old times with their joys or sorrows, the Rector came round gently and naturally to his favourite topic—his church. Leaning back with a quiet smile of satisfaction he discoursed of his fine old brasses, notably that of Sir Geoffry Treffry, which is unique ; of his decorated roof which he had triumphantly rescued from the barbaric whitewash, revealing all its hidden exquisite colouring, and then his oaken screen and pulpit in the style of the fifteenth century.

Looking in his face, the saddened lines of the mouth told of an earlier day when he had possibly loved and suffered passionately ; but however his spirit had been disturbed in the past, it had now regained all its tranquillity and natural sweetness.

Anstey, smoking lazily with half-closed eyes, was, strange to say, neither bored nor wearied. A hard-headed, practical barrister himself, from a work-a-day world of struggling men and women, to him there was something indescribably fresh, tenderly whimsical in his old friend's genuine enthusiasm over his black oak and his brasses. Anstey cared not one jot for such-like trifles ; he even entertained sacrilegious doubts as to dates, considered the evidence insufficient, and Sir Geoffry especially "shaky," which would have cut Tressilis to the heart. But these he buried in his professional breast, for he loved to listen to his friend and watch his face as he talked.

Tressilis's "set" had considered his acceptance of this Cornish living to be a mistake. He had been a man of mark among them—he was peculiarly refined and scholarly, and seemed little adapted for his rough charges ; but, as he pointed out, he was already their countryman, coming from an old Cornish family. He had been successful and made himself beloved, for he was never out of touch with them, and had the rarest tact.

Anstey, sickened with the world's follies and blunders, felt his soul positively soothed and healed as he listened to the simple gentleman's gossip, the chronicle of the fishers' lives bounded by the sea line and the next village, the luck of the herring fisheries, the gales that destroyed boats and nets and even the fishers themselves.

"It was one of those terrible gales about two years since that brought such mischief to poor Thirsa—I suppose that is why I think of her so much to-day. To be sure ! It was Christmas Day two years ago. It is a strange story," he went on. "We had very dirty weather about that time I remember ; heavy gales, and a tremendous sea on, and it was on Christmas night surely, when the coastguard came up to tell me there was a vessel ashore in St. Cleer's rocks, just below us here ; a narrow cleft in the huge wall of rock. It was a marvel how the wretched vessel had driven in ; when I got there she was crashing and bumping, first one side, then the other, as the great seas rolled



and roared against her. She was a complete wreck, we could see that, as well as some of the unhappy men still clinging to her as the rockets flashed into the night. The lifeboat was of course useless in such a case. We tried to get a line on board with rockets, but failed. She rolled so fearfully, struggling in her death-trap, that either we missed her, or those on board did not know how to make the line fast and use it. It was terrible to see her by the fitful lights going to pieces, and to hear at intervals above the wind and sea the shrieks of drowning men, and we could do nothing. A few went down the rocks in the faint hope of finding some living creature washed there. All our men and women were out above; they all turn out for a wreck. I went down too. I tell you, Anstey it was like going into the mouth of the inferno—the pitchy darkness, the unknown slippery rocks, the awful crashing and shrieking, the wild sea surging below. Suddenly I heard close by a woman's cry for help; I shouted back as well as I could in such a gale, and made my way in the direction of the voice. Some of the men came down just then, and we got a light for a moment and found Thirsa crouching on a narrow ledge of rock overhanging that mad sea and dragging from its white teeth—it seemed its prey—a drowned man! She had hold of him under the arm-pits, and so excited was she, and so tightly were her hands clenched about him that we could scarcely unlock them to take him from her. He was apparently quite dead, and bearing him between us we went slowly up the cliff; we took him to the inn where there were great fires made and hot coffee ready for the poor fellows, but alas! he was the only one rescued from that wreck.

"Prideaux, the little doctor, was there, and looked at him when we laid him down; he shook his head as he felt the heart.

"Too late, I'm afraid—he's a fine fellow too, and has fought hard for his life—we'll give him a chance of course."

"And the usual remedies were at once tried, but brought no sign of returning life. At last very reluctantly they desisted; there was no hope.

"Thirsa had been standing back unseen in the shadow; at this juncture she suddenly came forward.

"Let me try, sir! I can bring him back—I can—I can indeed, sir."

"The doctor was putting her aside roughly until I explained how bravely she had saved him from the sea.

"No use, my good girl; we can do nothing more, the poor chap's dead; go home and get some rest yourself."

"Do let me try, sir, she persisted, wringing her hands. 'I know I can bring him back; his life is mine—I saved him—he will hear me, sir; do let me try!'

"He turned away annoyed at her wilfulness.

"Oh, aye! try then if you like, you are an obstinate lot, you Cornish; you can't hurt him, that's certain; the poor lad's dead right enough, as you'll find."

"Having wrung a permission from him she next insisted on being

alone ; the doctor was nothing loth to leave the dim room for the blaze and comfort downstairs ; he withdrew with his assistants ; but I lingered at the door half-unwilling to leave a young girl alone in such circumstances ; not that she was hysterical, or even excited now, but extraordinarily calm and confident. I had hitherto known her only as a wild, dark-eyed girl living alone with her grandmother, who was reputed to be a witch ; to-night she had suddenly put on the dignity of womanhood.

"She evidently thought herself alone ; she approached the dead man, took both his hands in her own, and began a low wailing chant. I recognised an old Cornish charm for drowned sailors ; the weird monotonous rhythm was accompanied by a curious 'drawing' movement of the hands, as though she would draw his life to her ; it was even as you would fan a flickering flame. I closed the door softly and went down."

"I should have thought you would have felt obliged to protest, Tressilis, when it came to magic and the black arts."

"I never interfere with their fancies," he returned gently ; "they will soon die out unopposed ; none are seriously evil now—many are beautiful ; they have a strong hold in the hearts of the people ; they are older friends than I. I am careful in supplanting them. However, I am wandering, as usual. Now, Anstey, you will scarcely credit what I tell you, but when I went back to that room in half-an-hour, the girl was half lying on the pillow, the man's head on her bosom, their hands locked together, and both sleeping as sweetly as little children !"

"It is marvellous," said Anstey, fairly surprised by the other's impressive manner. "How do you account for it ?"

"It is unaccountable with our present knowledge ; only there was something beyond our skill in this woman's love and faith, stronger than death, and the will that would not let the life she had saved slip back into darkness again. I left them undisturbed and went down with my strange news to find Prideaux. I must say he did not take it at all well ; he swore a good deal and seemed much disgusted. However, Captain Lamont mended rapidly ; we never found any traces of his crew, and the vessel was smashed into matchwood. The pecuniary loss did not seem to trouble him much, though he was also the owner, but he bitterly mourned the brave fellows he could never replace. He had some notes of considerable value about him in an oil-skin case, and was thus enabled to stay on comfortably at the village inn until the spring came round ; he was a general favourite, especially with the children, for whom he made all manner of curious toys, or told them tales of wonder and travels in his queer broken English. I liked him as well as the rest ; he often walked up here in the evenings, and as he made his cigarettes and smoked, he would tell me all his troubles. These were nothing very serious—a doting mother, somewhat arbitrary, who thought to control him, a grown man, by holding the purse tightly and keeping him at her apron-string.

"She was the widow of a wealthy shop-keeper; they had been originally very poor people, but frugal and industrious; at his father's death Leon had broken loose from his mother's irksome restraint, and gone to sea; that was about five years before the time he was thrown among us. After his second voyage he bought a small vessel for himself, the ill-fated *Belle Marie*; he had inherited a small sum on his father's death, but the bulk of the money was enjoyed by his mother for her life, and, strangely enough, she had the power to will it away from him if she chose; she seemed, from his account, to abuse her position and continually menace him with disinheritance, and I could read how her threats galled his proud spirit.

"Leon had written to his mother, assuring her of his safety and his miraculous escapes, but still he stayed on in our quiet village, unwilling perhaps to lose his freedom, his brief holiday; but most unwilling to leave Thirsa.

"Their love for each other was remarkable; it was so natural, so complete; they were always together, like twin children, and, indeed, it seemed as though the life Thirsa had saved and claimed as 'her life' were indeed a part of her own. When I found things were in this case I spoke to Leon, suggesting he should write to his mother, telling her all and asking her consent to their engagement or marriage, and to bring Thirsa home to her. I saw the reply, a hard and ill-advised letter; she had other views for him, and desired his betrothal to the daughter of an old neighbour. She concluded by demanding his immediate return to fulfil her wishes.

"He brought the letter up to me with cheeks aflame, and, as was excusable in a young lover full of defiance, a spark would have kindled a flame of rebellion. Now you know, Anstey, I am a thorough man of business, so I began by putting things to him in a practical, common-sense way. As he had lost all his means they, the young couple, would be dependent on her goodwill; it was not worth while to lose such a pretty fortune through petulance; it would give his wife an easy life and spare him the chances of seafaring. Later on I tried to show him the consideration he owed the mother who had loved and laboured for him through his youth; it was at least advisable he should go home at once, and he would doubtless gain her consent when she found his happiness was involved. I did not feel any scruple on the score of Thirsa's humble parentage and defective education; the Lamonts had an equally obscure origin, and Madame Lamont's letters and mode of thought showed me her lack of education and refinement; Leon was certainly a fine, generous-hearted young fellow, but of no especial cultivation; so I had no fear Thirsa would trespass on any gentle prejudices; though simple she was not vulgar. To my mind there was nothing to separate them but the great gulf of money, and this I thought Leon's love should bridge.

"He bade me farewell the next day, though he had not arranged to

leave until a fortnight later, but I was off to Truro for a month's visit ; when I returned he was gone : and from then to now we have never had any sign from him.

"Thirsa went about merry enough for the first few months ; she did not expect a letter, I daresay. They do not write much, about here, and though I wondered we had no news I would not make her uneasy. As time went on, however, she drooped and grew pale and thin, and eyed me wistfully when we met, like some suffering dumb thing.

"I felt linked to her by my knowledge of her story and my friendship for her lover ; I tried to win her confidence, but I fancied she avoided me. Then came the saddest part—the village folk began to look askance at her, and one day my housekeeper told me in her stiffest tones that 'degraded, shameless young woman, Thirsa Mitchell, wished to see me, and she was nigh upon death since her little son was born that morning.'

"I was thunderstruck ; poor, childish Thirsa ! I was full of grief for my blindness, my carelessness. I hastened to the cottage, for whatever had happened, what sin or folly, I felt I was heavily responsible for this young creature. Now I knew the meaning of the innuendoes, the shrugs and sighs of late when Thirsa had been mentioned ; they had passed me unheeded.

"The cottage was small and poor, but had always hitherto been kept scrupulously clean and bright ; to-day it looked forlorn and miserable ; the old grandmother was brewing an evil-looking mess over the dying fire, and upstairs I found poor Thirsa very white and weak, alone in the bare cold chamber with her wailing baby beside her. She knew me, though I could see she was desperately ill ; she moved her parched lips and made a sign for drink ; there was none. I went down and got some water, which she drank eagerly. Then she laid awhile quite still, evidently gathering her strength for some supreme effort ; she drew at last from her bosom a bright new wedding-ring on a ribbon ; this she held up to me with trembling fingers. I understood her meaning in a moment ; it flashed on me like an inspiration—she was married already to Leon ; secretly, while I was away at Truro probably. He had begged her, for his sake, not to divulge it until he had won his mother's consent—and she had been faithful, poor girl, to the hurt of her good name.

"I took it from her.

"'My dear,' said I, answering the mute agony of her eyes, 'I know all you would say if you could speak—God tells me for you ; I understand everything, but you must not hide this any longer, for the sake of the little son ; you will injure him if you do not wear it and take your right place and name ; let me put your wedding-ring on for you—Thirsa Lamont.'

"I placed it on her finger and laid her baby on her arm, but she held my hand fast until she fell asleep.

"Thirsa got slowly better ; I managed to get a good nurse for her,

but she remained weak and listless for a long time after. Prideaux came round and helped us, saying, in his grim way, she had better have left things alone, and this was all she had got by her interference. The old women shook their heads and croaked that those you save from drowning are bound to do you an injury. And in short, Anstey, no one believes the girl's story but myself."

"How do they account for the ring?"

"Oh! they do not accept circumstantial evidence if it is unpleasant. She cannot, unfortunately, remember where she was married; it was in some large town, and they went by rail and then took a steamer. The grandmother was an intolerable old woman, and persecuted Thirsa shamefully; of course she had borne a very bad reputation herself in her younger days, and was peculiarly spiteful. She died and released Thirsa from her tyranny when the child was three or four months old, and from that time the mother and child began to thrive and pick up, the cottage became neat and bright, and Thirsa went back to her old life with the self-reliance and self-respect you have seen. She has told me the knowledge of my belief in her made her braver to face the curious, unfriendly faces; she would have fled, but for that, to some town, and probably to ruin. With her baby in a shawl at her back, she first went down to the beach again, buying her fish from the boats as they came in; she takes these to the country houses in a donkey-cart; the little one now sits in it sturdy and brown, with a green branch from the hedges, while she walks beside: you may meet them any day in the lanes. In winter she knits—they tell me she knits on Sundays; I am pained by their want of common charity, and I believe it to be scandal; but if she does, there is the bread to be earned, poor thing! She lives alone except for the baby, who goes everywhere with her. The people would have forgiven her by now if she had owned her disgrace, but of course she cannot do so, and will not be received on sufferance, and claims her position, so the breach is still open."

"Do you think he will return now?"

"She believes it—but I doubt it," said Tressilis sadly; "and yet I cannot think him so infamous; I am sure he rang true, Anstey, and had an honest heart. Perhaps he has met his death—there are so many chances in this world. We are brought continually face to face with the strangest——"

He stopped to listen, for there was an unwonted sound of wheels, and a loud knocking at the door, curiously audible, for the wind had dropped and it was a quiet night.

The housekeeper entered visibly flurried and with a pale face.

"A gentleman, sir—I think it is——"

But pushing past her the visitor entered unceremoniously, a stalwart young man, browsed and dark-bearded, holding both his hands out eagerly.

"Lamont!"

"Mr. Tressilis! What can you tell me of Thirsa? What can you think of me?"

The time went by unheeded in mutual explanations; it was an hour since the strange guest came; he glanced at the clock impatiently.

"I must go—I must see her—my wife! Will you come with me, Mr. Tressilis?"

But Tressilis shook his head, smiling.

"To-morrow; I will walk over to-morrow with Mr. Anstey," he said.

As they stood at the door to see him off, the moon shone brightly in the clear sky, and the Christmas bells began to ring in the old turret; there was a glow in each cottage in the village below, for none was so poor but it had a Yule log or "mock" kindled on the hearth.

"What a sweet peal it is!" said the Rector lovingly, with his head on one side. "Listen to that, Anstey! It looks like a frost," he added, as the gig wheels echoed crisply on the road. "Why, bless my soul, I have forgotten the baby!"

And so he had, and was surprised into language of unusual strength by such an omission; there had been so much to explain on Lamont's side, that the Rector may be pardoned for forgetting such an interesting circumstance.

It was indeed an odd story, a veritable chapter of accidents. Anstey doubted if anyone could be imposed on by reading such an account; but to hear the man tell it, to watch his emotional southern face and glowing eyes, was to feel its truth.

He had stayed with his mother for several months, trying vainly by all gentle means to gain her consent, and during all this period he wrote frequently both to Thirsa and Mr. Tressilis.

He admitted, with a flush, there was now no doubt but his mother had tampered with the letters and stopped them. He naturally wondered why no replies came, and at last he could endure the suspense no longer, and told his mother all—even his secret marriage to Thirsa—and his determination to return at once to England. She passionately forbade him, and refused to recognise a marriage which would in France be illegal without her consent; she swore if he brought his young wife home she would brand her with disgrace; there was a furious quarrel, and he hastened his preparations to leave her for ever.

Before he could start he was struck down by fever, for which his past anxiety and excitement had ill-prepared him, and for three months hovered between life and death, wasted to the extreme of weakness by frequent relapses. The medical men ordered a long sea voyage, as soon as he was in a fair way to recovery—to Australia, trusting the fine air and quiet life would complete his cure. He protested he must return to England, and begged to see his letters.

Then, turning her head away to avoid the sight of his anguish, his



mother told him with strange gentleness Thirsa was dead, and his journey would be unavailing. She had destroyed Mr. Tressilis's letter, she said—the sad news had come when his fever was at its height, but she gave him—without looking in his face, the bright wedding-ring which she said had been taken from his dead wife's hand. Leon had told her so much of his story, and the confiscated letters supplied other details, so she wove her tale with perfect plausibility. She was very tender with him, and he was so weak and helpless he laid his head on her bosom and cried like a little child again.

A week later they started for Australia. In his first sharp sorrow the monotony of a sailing vessel seemed unendurable, but he gained strength daily; they made a short tour in Australia, seeing the chief cities and the country hurriedly. Madame Lamont tried vainly to interest him, and they were both well pleased to turn their faces homeward. She too seemed listless and unsatisfied, even when she gained her home, and never resumed her old interests or active life. She had greatly changed, and watched Leon continually with a glance, half jealous, half fearful, and waited on him with painful assiduity.

Chastened by his own grief, he became very tender and forbearing to her as she slowly failed, until one day he found her lying in her favourite seat in the garden, with her face all drawn and grey, and he knew the end had come, before the old doctor pronounced the case hopeless. It was a question of a few hours only; she would never regain speech.

All day she laid with wide open eyes—thinking of what?—and Leon watched her, holding her hand. At evening she raised herself slightly, pointing to the wedding ring he now always wore.

"A lie!" she whispered in a hoarse strange voice. "A lie—forgive!"

In a moment he had guessed her sin, and the cruel wrong done them. He instinctively recoiled from her, but the mute look of agony in her eyes touched him, and, with a tumult of love and pity in his heart, he bent down and kissed the mother who bore him, and so she died in peace.

Thirsa was standing at her cottage door, the narrow road ran beside her little garden, and beyond stretched the shining sea, rippling softly in the moonlight.

She, too, had heard those Christmas bells, and throwing aside her knitting, had come to listen to their music which called to her strangely through the night.

"A happy Christmas; peace and good-will, good tidings—good tidings—a happy Christmas!"

Well, Christmas had come once more, with its fair promise, but had yet brought her little happiness; still one day the "good tidings"

would surely come, for she saw no shadow on her love's truth ; and as the bells rang out, her brave young heart, full of love and hope, answered them as clearly—"A happy Christmas, and peace and good-will to all!"

A faint sound came out of the silent night ; nearer and nearer down the road, the regular beat of a horse's hoofs, the rolling of wheels, fantastic shadows in the moonlight, all whirling merrily along, as in a dream, until they stopped at her gate ; and the strangest vision of all, the form of one risen from the dead, leaped down. But she was taken into warm living arms, and held safe in their strength, and all her wild tears of joy kissed away.

"You have changed, too, love!" he said, holding her away from him a moment, but never letting her go. "I left you a slim slip of a girl ; you are a beautiful woman now, my wife!"

She nestled closer to him.

"This has always been my heart's home," he went on, "and it is all as I have pictured it. Ah! many a weary time, all the same, unchanged. There the hives stood in summer, and the rose-bush grows—I have the last rose you gave me in my breast. There is the seat where we sat together ; and is my old chair still in its place?"

And he looked within.

His chair was gone from its nook in the chimney corner, its place usurped by a cradle with a sleeping baby! In his chubby hand he held the little toy his mother, in spite of her poverty, had bought him, mindful of his Christmas ; he had played with it all the evening, and now had fallen asleep with it in his arms.

Lamont started, looked at the child, then to his wife. Smiling, she took his hand and led him proudly to the cradle.

"This is our boy!" said she.

And then he took her again, closer to him, kissing her with a new love and reverence, for she was the mother of his son!

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## A WAYSIDE CALVARY.

Low in the glory of the west  
 Calm lay the fleecy amber bars ;  
 Home went the weary ones to rest,  
 And, one by one, came out the stars.  
 The tall, dark poplars by the stream  
 Stood out against the rosy sky,  
 Which threw its tender, lingering gleam  
 Upon a wayside calvary.

The village murmur rose and fell,  
 The maiden's song so low and sweet,  
 The sound of holy vesper bell,  
 The children's laughter in the street ;  
 Whilst, on that lonely wayside shrine,  
 Back from the quaint old hamlet's din,  
 There hung that Form of love divine  
 Who saves poor souls from guilt and sin.

There came a man with silvery hair,  
 The scars of fourscore weary years  
 Upon his face. His lowly prayer,  
 Baptised with penitential tears,  
 Rose to the Form that hung on high  
 Against the slowly dying day :  
 The pilgrim felt that Heaven was nigh,  
 And passed in peace upon his way.

With gentle step a maiden came,  
 All clad in maidenhood's sweet grace ;  
 Low murmuring her loved one's name,  
 With sinless blush upon her face,  
 She humbly knelt upon the ground  
 And spake to Heaven her simple prayer ;  
 Until at length sweet peace she found,  
 And left her fears and sorrows there.

The full moon rose behind the hill ;  
 Its beams lit up the Saviour's face ;  
 The sleeping land around lay still,  
 And no soul sought that lonely place.  
 At last there came with wavering tread,  
 Her bosom filled with vague alarms,  
 A woman fair, with grief-bowed head,  
 Her child of sin within her arms.

Amidst her loud and anguished prayer  
 The babe awoke with feeble wail ;  
 When lo ! throughout the moonlit air,  
 Clear trilled a tuneful nightingale !  
 It seemed a voice from Paradise  
 That sang of her dark sin forgiven ;  
 She rose with hope throned in her eyes,  
 And in her heart sweet thoughts of Heaven.

ALEXANDER LAMONT,

## LETTERS FROM SOUTH AFRICA.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, F.R.G.S., AUTHOR OF "IN THE LOTUS LAND," ETC., ETC.

CARHAIX. *July*, 1893.

CARE AMICE,—The picturesque syllables of Bloemfontein fell upon our ears ; a welcome sound. The night journey had been long, and the most willing guard in the world could not make it otherwise than tedious. Now and then a jerk over a badly laid rail, or stoppage at an infrequent station, disturbed our light unrestful slumbers. We looked out upon the blackness of darkness perhaps only to see a gaunt, solitary signal post looming in the darkness, stretching a portentous arm over endless plains, as though bidding us pass on into the night and the for ever, and be heard of no more. It looked indeed the "lone, lone land." Wide plains that seemed unending, over which, in the night sky the stars flashed with intense brilliancy, yet gave no reflection. Then the break of day, when light faintly dawned and crept over the earth like a moving mysterious spirit ; an influence before which all things of evil fled ; every moment disclosing beauties of sky and colouring. Next the pleasant break at Kronstad, where we had a glimpse of South African life both in its colonial and native state ; where the copper-coloured children ran naked, and the mothers bestowed liberal chastisements, which the little urchins treated with sublime indifference, and seemed to look upon as part of the day's diversion.

We pictured Mrs. S. in the midst of this strange life, so opposed to all the refined appointments and possibilities of her English home ; to which surely nothing could reconcile her but the happiness of beholding the long unseen face of a beloved son. We looked out upon the handful of houses snugly reposing on the plain, surrounded by trees and gardens : an earthly paradise. Near them ran the Valsch, where fishing and boating is a great resource ; a stream adding much to the beauty of the little town. And we passed away from it all and steamed onward through the wide, flat, far-reaching plains of the Orange Free State, where countless cattle grazed, and a world of land awaits cultivation, and below the surface lie inestimable riches.

We were glad to come to an anchor at Bloemfontein, and change the scene. After a long sixteen hours' journey it was good to lose the ceaseless clang and jar of the train. The station is large and imposing, one of the best in South Africa, where they do not go in, as a rule, for miles of platform, and wonderful roofs supported by marble columns, and Directors' Board Rooms with Watteau ceilings, and gilded cornices, and 15th century Persian rugs—those rare dreams

of colouring and design. They have not yet accomplished these luxuries in South Africa, as we have in England.

The station was fairly crowded, and we wondered whether it was a market or a fair day—and hoped it was not; for these events are only interesting to those immediately concerned; everything and everybody else they disorganise. We soon discovered that the town was in its usual peace and repose, bordering upon stagnation, and the crowded platform was an everyday occurrence, of which the mainspring was curiosity. It was something to see and do, an object for going out. The arrival of the train was a great event, bringing a flash of life and excitement to the sleepy little settlement: a change of human faces and human tones; the earnest of an outside world of activity, of great aims and ambitions; a vast hurrying population of whose existence one might well begin to doubt in this quiet neighbourhood.

The little crowd was concentrated upon the platform. We passed out of it into a new world of comparative desolation. An omnibus took charge of our fragments of luggage—the greater part of which, you will remember, is going about the world in detachments: perhaps at this very moment setting off the dusky beauty of a South Sea Island squaw. The hotel was not far off, and after sixteen hours in the train we preferred to walk. The road was white and wide, flat and straight as an arrow.

From the first moment we felt there was a lightness about the place conducive to cheerfulness. Perhaps it was as well, for we found little else. In a comparatively new country everything must be more or less after the same pattern. The beauty of time and age has fallen upon nothing—and here in the ages to come will have nothing to fall upon. Of this you warned me; somewhat ruthlessly comparing the experiences of South Africa with those we went through together in Cairo: placing such dream monuments as the Mosques, the Tombs of the Caliphs, the Pyramids, in contrast with the modern element of this new continent. But it is not always May even in travelling, and in visiting new countries we must be content to sacrifice that which most appeals to us—the Wonders of Architecture, the Beauty of Decay. There will be no resurrection of the old days; the Feudal ages with their wonderful influences are dead. This extinction of charm is one of the signs that the world is really growing old. At the end of the 19th century we have fallen on debased times. In the ages to come our century will be looked upon as the Ultima Thule of all that was barbarous—supposing that Beauty and great things should ever revive. But we have enjoyed one advantage not possessed by those who have gone before, or by those who shall come after: we have seen the great monuments of the Middle Ages at their best; when the hand of Time was placing his final touch upon them; when the charm of age was most apparent, veiled in all the pathos and loveliness of things about to pass away. In how many is not the charm even now diminishing? Alas, a thing of beauty is not always a joy for ever!

We found nothing of all this in Bloemfontein : no charm of form, no refinement of decay. But as the syllables are picturesque and suggestive, we somehow expected more from Bloemfontein than from any other place we visited, and if we were disappointed we were only going through a very ordinary experience.

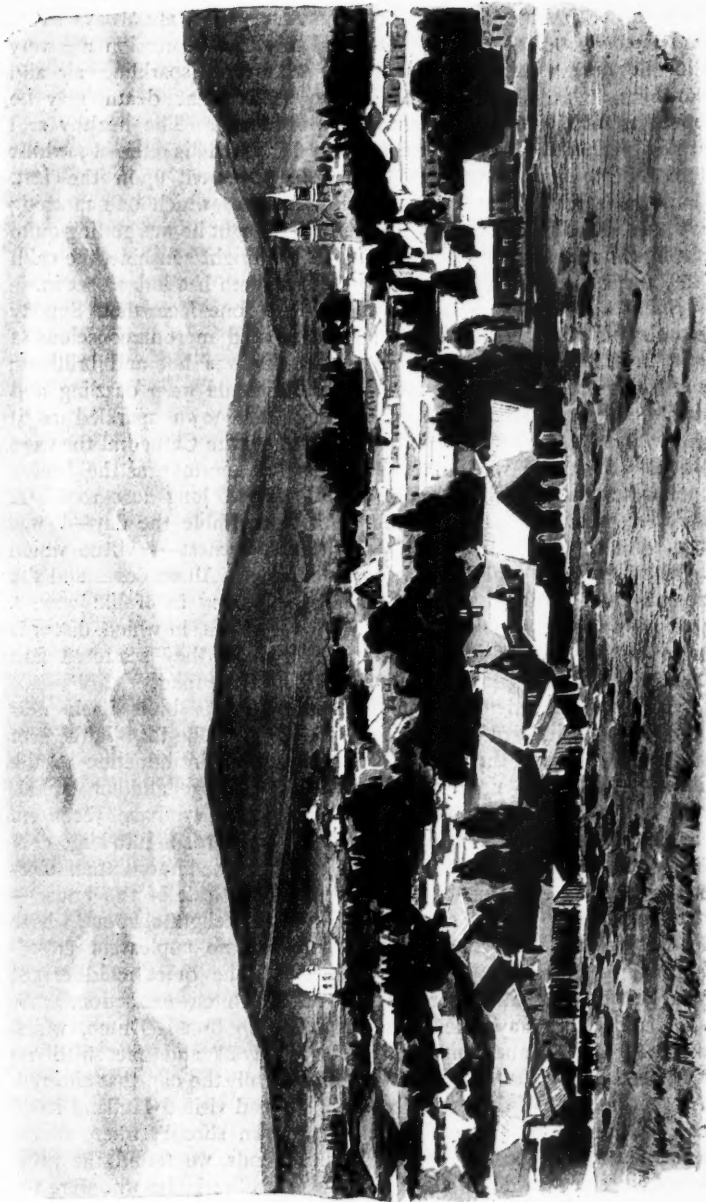
Lightness and brightness were its characteristics, chiefly due to atmosphere and blue skies ; and perhaps to the aspect of the houses, for the most part red or white ; some of them like painted zebras. In the brilliant sunshine it was rather dazzling. The town lies on a high, wide plain, which stretches for miles around. For this reason it is considered especially healthy, and many invalids come to Bloemfontein as a last resource, and are able to live here when they could not live at home. To us, it is rather a mystery ; one would suppose the irritation set up by the sand-storms fatal to delicate lungs. But facts are stronger than arguments, and it is certain that many partially recover and live on to old age.

A quiet, uneventful existence, where one may go to roost at cock-crow and rise with the sun. The town is so small that it resembles a large village. From a rather unpicturesque square four long streets run out to the four points of the compass. But even these thoroughfares have a rustic look about them, an appearance of country lanes. There is a general impression of houses standing in gardens encircled by waving trees and flowering hedges ; but it is all very subdued, as if its inhabitants had retired from the world, or were all in the sere and yellow leaf, or had lost their energy. In our wanderings we passed up and down the white roads, some of them lying between sandy banks above which stood the houses and gardens, whilst in other instances they were as much below the road—and we might have been monarchs of all we surveyed ; once or twice the sounds of a piano let us know that inhabitants existed and were not all sleeping, but they made no other sign.

Yet it has its importance, this Capital of a Dutch Republic. Its people are beginning to realise that there is a world beyond the Orange Free State, and they must awaken to play their part in it. Of late it has made strides : many churches, colleges, schools and religious institutions have sprung up. The Roman Catholic element seems to have made efforts in South Africa, and here they are also evident. Bloemfontein has long been the seat of an Anglican Bishopric, and the Cathedral very much resembles that of Pretoria : small and low, with a dim religious light about it, but remarkable only for its atmosphere of repose. On Sunday the service was well attended, and quietly performed. Bishop and Dean were both away on their travels.

Many of the congregation looked delicate, and the reason of their presence in the town was only too evident. It is not given to all to recover. Some linger on for a year or two, and then quietly pass away to the Land o' the Leal, their journey soothed, their sufferings diminished by the light atmosphere. It also has the effect of buoying





BLOEMFONTEIN.

them up with hopes that, though sometimes false, are always sweet and always good to possess. Despondency and depression are very difficult here. In this land of blue skies and sparkling air and sunshine it is almost impossible to realise that death may be hovering near. Man forgets that he is mortal. The healthy and strong feel they can never grow old; youth is eternal; whilst the delicate fancy every new day an improvement upon the last. This, we repeat, is good; a merciful illusion, which one morning changes to reality. Yesterday the sufferer thought he was getting quite strong and well; this morning, looking at the bright sunshine, the calm blue sky, suddenly the end comes; eternal youth has indeed set in.

Such a story we read on more than one face that Sunday morning in the little Cathedral: none seemed more unconscious of it than the invalids themselves. The day was hot and brilliant; sunshine poured down upon all; the white roads were dazzling and dusty; the little stream flowing through the town sparkled as it ran with a cool refreshing sound; round about the Cathedral the trees waved and stirred with the faintest possible murmur, as the breeze touched them. Their shadows fell upon the long low roof. A stranger preached. The sermon did not resemble the day—it was not brilliant, and if tedious it was at least earnest—a virtue which atones for a good deal of mental shortcoming. All was over and the congregation streamed out and dispersed, looking as if life were a pastoral symphony to be leisurely played through, in which discords were unknown. It was surprising how soon they scattered and disappeared, leaving no traces but the dust of the road.

In its awakened condition Bloemfontein has built itself new Houses of Parliament: a handsome building. The town is the seat of Government and the Law Courts. Having an introduction to the President we called upon him. His house is large and substantial, built of stone: the most imposing Presidency we have yet seen. To pass from the hot sunshine and glaring white roads into large cool halls was delightful. The Dutch element reigned more than elsewhere in Bloemfontein. Simplicity seemed the rule of the house—simplicity which always charms. In a large, delightful room, whose leading feature was space, because there was no unpleasant crowding of chairs and tables, we took tea. The quiet maid-servant was Dutch, as Dutch her master—or of Dutch extraction. As she handed the tray, she asked each one in broad Dutch, which sounded quaint and singular, “Kop o’ tay?” and met with no refusals that hot afternoon. It was emphatically the cup that cheered. All reminded us of days gone by when we had visited Holland itself, the picturesque little country so near our own shores; where amidst new friends, now become old and true friends, we found the same simplicity side by side with the refinements of life; ladies who were the intimates of Royalty and danced with the King; who delighted you with the strains of Beethoven, and wonderful sketches of nature;

yet looked carefully to their best china services and assisted their maidens in household mysteries. But this simplicity, the delight of life, is seldom seen, and few realise how much is lost.

Bloemfontein itself seemed less Dutch than English. English appeared the prevailing element, perhaps because we saw so few interiors. There was an English atmosphere about the Free State Hotel: a curious building taking up very much of one side of the square, evidently enlarged at different times. Wide and straggling, its back premises looked upon another world: the running stream, and fields and stretches of country beyond—the vast surrounding plains of Bloemfontein. From the front of the hotel one saw all the life of the place, such as it was. Before us the club, sole literary harbour of refuge; the hotel did not cater for the intellectual needs of its guests, and had not even a reading-room. In the centre of the market-place was an erection which might be a village pump-room, orchestra, or small market house. Here on the quiet Sunday morning the Salvation Army endeavoured to create a sensation: the fragment of a band struck up a series of discords which set all the dogs of the neighbourhood howling, and made all the peace-loving, music-loving inhabitants truly wretched. The army seemed unpopular in Bloemfontein. After blowing and whistling for half-an-hour, it performed a final shriek, and followed by a severe-looking female in green spectacles, and a child, marched off in offended dignity to the sound of a big drum.

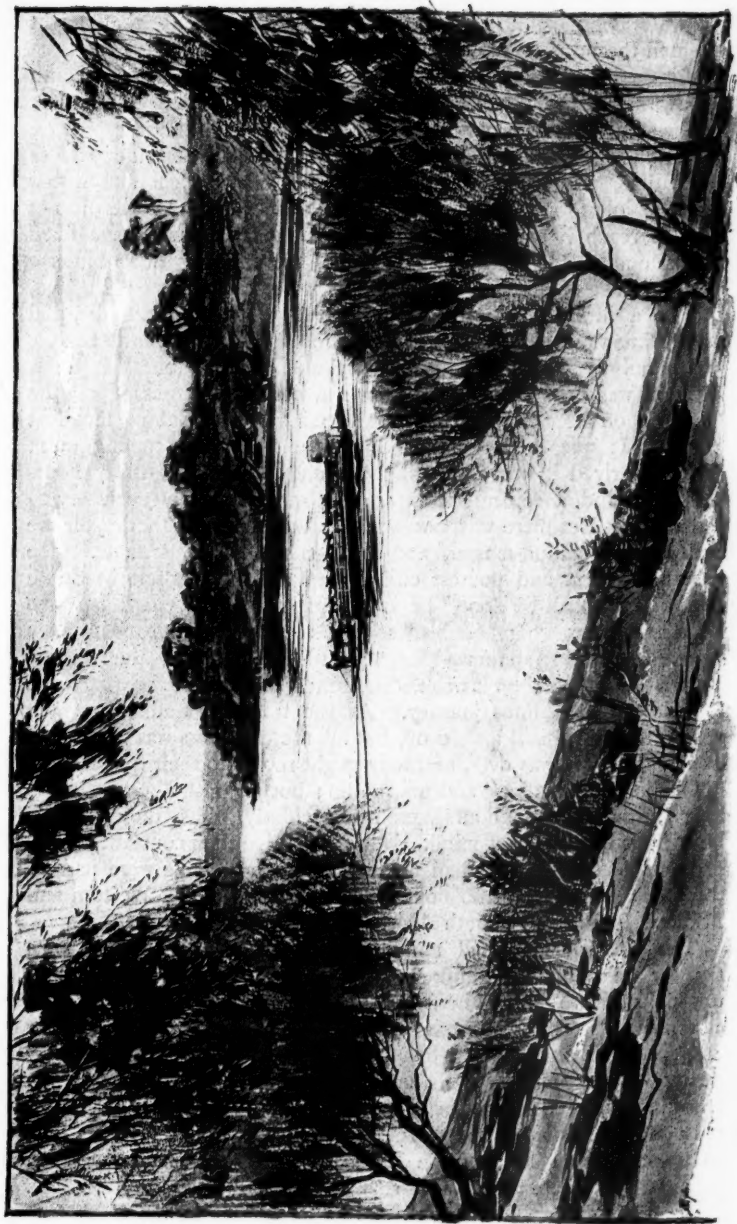
There was quite a small crowd of people at the hotel, chiefly consisting of a theatrical company that, at dinner, occupied a large and select table to themselves. Ladies in "patches, paint and powder" reversed the order of things, quaffed the gentlemen in sparkling wines, and drank to each other's success in love and war. All evidently felt that a Colonial life was intended to be free and easy, and it was their duty to uphold the traditions of the country. They were travelling about, living a career of change and variety so pleasant to those with backs fitted to the burden. Its very uncertainties have their charm. What can be so inspiring to hope, than the prospective full exchequer of to-morrow as a set-off against the empty certainty of to-day? And romance often steps in and adds its interest and glamour to the scene. The old tale is ever being retold, varying slightly in detail, perhaps, but the same in its broad outlines. The ladies and gentlemen of the company, many of whom have gone through the experience, suddenly notice that they have an Edwin and Angelina amongst them. The real drama of life runs side by side with the sham drama on the stage, until marriage puts an end to the excitement, and the heroes fall into the commonplace. It all looks very pretty on paper; the fool's paradise is very sweet whilst it lasts, and in a few cases its fragrance never dies. There are lovely flowers that bloom for ever, and melodies that never cease.

On the whole Bloemfontein left on us the impression of a quiet

sunny place, where life may pass untouched by hurry and care, and those who are not strong may escape the race for wealth; a large wholesome village with some of the advantages of a small town. The ecclesiastical influence is strongly represented by the mitre; the President adds to its dignity; the Law Courts and Houses of Parliament contribute their mild intellectual excitement, and help outsiders to pass away the time, which too often runs "with lingering steps and slow." The fine air brings healing on its wings: the hue of health frequently returns to the "pallid sorrowful face." Where it is not so, the downward passage is a question of degrees, of imperceptible changes; line upon line, here a little and there a little. The whole place is bright; if it had a fault it was the absence of all shade. Even now in autumn, most of the houses seemed to keep their shutters closed, to remain cool and dark within, for few houses were built like the Presidency. It was from behind these shutters that we heard the strains of music, to which we listened like the Peri at the Gate of Eden.

We had to leave all this quiet charm. It was Sunday afternoon when we turned our faces towards the railway station. The day had been full of the "Sabbath stillness," which everywhere distinguishes the Day of Rest in South Africa. We found no exception to this golden rule. Even the ladies and gentlemen, whose business it was to go through life acting a part, had been a shade less hilarious at the mid-day table-d'hôte: and if paint and powder were a little more conspicuous in the garish daylight, whose business was it to object if they did not care? True, when dinner was over, they went off in small detachments, having apparently hired all that Bloemfontein could produce in the way of conveyances. The ladies, resplendent in gauzy robes and flowing frills and flounces, glittering with jewels, seemed to disappear in a series of sun-flashes. Their destination was mysterious. Asking our hosts for information, we were told that there were serious thoughts of founding an Agapemone in the neighbourhood of Bloemfontein, and they had gone to inspect a special spot. But it was a mere rumour, that probably would come to nothing.

It is abundantly evident that there was nothing very much to detain us in this little Free State Capital, yet we left it with regret. As we turned towards the station, we saw stretched across the sky in large letters: *The Beginning of the End*. But it was more than this; it was almost the end itself. Nothing but a long journey lay between us and Cape Town. We should have to sleep one night on the road, but as far as we knew it would be a halt without "experiences," for we arrived after dark, and left at daybreak. So we felt rather sad and sorrowful. This having to leave a place too soon is often a drawback to travelling. New scenes that charm, new friends that delight, are about to pass out of our lives, probably for ever. Everything is steeped in that halo that surrounds the beautiful and the unfamiliar; the atmosphere is all couleur de rose. What possibilities



IN THE TRANSVAAL.

are we leaving behind? What chances of friendships that might brighten the future?

Not that this was altogether our experience in going through South Africa, though in most places we should have been glad of a longer stay. One likes to grow at home with even uninteresting places, unless they are, like East London, altogether beyond the pale of civilisation. Especially we regretted our inability to penetrate further into the interior. H. wanted his turn at big game. If he did not wish to reach home in the lion's skin, he at least would have liked to take one with him: whilst we felt that the discovery of an hitherto unknown race or unseen Niagara would confer honour upon England, and be a fitting conclusion to our travels. It was not to be, and no one knows what posterity may have lost for want of a little time.

The railway station could not be included in the Sabbath stillness. Again it was crowded, and there was a certain eagerness upon the little sea of faces, as if all were expecting the arrival of long-lost friends. It was nothing but the excitement of the coming train. When it arrived it was very full. We had a journey of thirty hours before us, and a separate compartment was absolutely necessary to endurance. Yet there was not one vacant carriage. In despair we besieged the station-master, and whispered a powerful name. He was the kindest and politest official we met in the whole of South Africa. "It shall be done," he said, and calling the guard he gave his instructions. "Impossible," replied the guard, looking extremely dejected. "Then perform the impossible," returned the station-master. And somehow it was accomplished, and made every difference to a long and tedious journey. As the train steamed out of the station the crowd still looked on, but all the eagerness was gone; the event of the day was over, and they might return to their quiet ways.

Our journey was long and uneventful; but we resign ourselves to long journeys and the hours pass unconsciously, whilst they can only be tedious to the vacant mind. New scenes give their constant charm, and our present journey had no lack of interest. We were passing through the great Karroo country, a vast tract in the Western and Midland Provinces of South Africa.

The Karroo is a small stunted shrub overrunning the plains, not for miles but for hundreds of miles. In summer it is burnt up, looks brown and withered. The whole country far as the eye can reach is desert-like and barren. Great black patches meet the eye as though burnt by fire. Between are spaces of sandy waste. Few trees are visible, and these are of the acacia species: Doornboom, as the Boers call them. Even these are usually seen only on the banks of the rivers, whose dry courses they help you to trace. The shrubs of the Karroo country are bushes from five to eight feet high, varied with smaller plants one or two feet high. When the summer heat has passed and rain comes, the whole face of the country changes. The black and burnt patches disappear;



brown leaves turn green ; new leaves shoot forth : the young plants are covered with beautiful flowers. Bulbous plants are common, and sometimes spring up and bloom afresh after being apparently dead and withered for three or four years. A fortnight after the rain has come the rivers are running and singing for joy ; the desert has suddenly become a fruitful wilderness. There are times when an apparently arid plain will suddenly blaze out, as if on fire for hundreds of acres, with the beautiful flower of the *compositæ* : here a glowing red, there a brilliant purple ; whilst above them, weird and ghastly, the white and withered branches of dead shrubs spread their long lean arms. Many flowers are beautiful, but the *compositæ* are the most abundant in the wonderful Karroo country.

The mountains rising here and there are bare and rocky, as though nothing had ever grown upon them or ever would grow. Wild ravines cut the plains, and seldom is the pleasant sound of running water heard in their depths. In winter the sheep feed upon the shrub, and many parts of the Karroo are vast sheep-walks. Even in summer, when the shrub looks brown and dead, they manage to exist upon it until better days set in. The country, apparently so desert-like, might be made abundantly fertile ; where it has been cleared it yields rich returns, in spite of the danger of long summer droughts. The average level of the Karroo district is about 3000 feet above the sea. Its mountains occasionally rise to 5000 feet, but some of the peaks of the Zwarteburg range rise over 7000 feet.

In the tropical regions of South Africa they are higher. A mountain chain 10,000 feet high will slope so gradually to the sea, that its surface is diversified by rivers and valleys. There are great tracts of bush country in these tropical regions ; the pasture-land is rich and the grass luxuriant. But how different, how much more trying the warm moist climate, which is produced by the currents of the Indian Ocean. Yet how magnificent the forests, how varied and abundant the flowers.

The air upon the high Karroo plateau is light and dry. In summer the unclouded skies look molten and glowing ; a faint haze veils the horizon. The prevalent winds are the north and north-west. They have passed over the desert, and are of the nature of the simoom. Clouds of red dust accompany them ; their heat is tremendous. But they soon depart, and do no great harm. Thunderstorms sometimes clear the atmosphere ; storms England knows not of. The whole sky is one blaze of lightning, the whole air one sound of rolling thunder, the rainfall a deluge. In a few hours vast tracts of country become as lakes ; dams burst and rivers overflow, and great damage is done. But these are the chances of life in South Africa. As a rule, overwhelming misfortune does not come ; the evil has generally its remedy ; life on the whole is prosperous.

Winter in the Karroo is delightful. It is the great time for invalids, yet few seem to realise the fact. For six hours of the day the sun

shines as it does with us in summer. There is a delicious crispness in the air. Man seems gifted with wings; his feet scarcely touch the ground as he walks. Fires are only wanted in the evening. The nights are cold, but not too cold: and in this dry atmosphere the cold of winter brings no shiver even to sensitive frames.

For the same reason the great heat of summer is not oppressive, excepting for the short time the north wind blows. The air is singularly pure and free from any floating matter; it is full of ozone, rarefied and clear; whilst in winter its stillness may be felt. Those who live here for a time revel in a sense of freedom and expanse impossible to describe. Earth appears boundless as heaven. The mind responds to the influence, and all narrowing influences seem withdrawn for ever. Life is not a rush and a scramble. The race for wealth is a mere expression, unknown, unrealised. The daily annals of existence are fine broad outlines, noble and dignified. There is a grandeur in these surroundings, and we ourselves must be responsive.

The summers, owing to the extreme dryness, are less trying than might be supposed. It is the damp tropical heat which kills. Here, in the Karroo, there is none of that painful experience. No doubt the drawbacks are considerable, but they are not overwhelming. The heat brings languor and loss of appetite; the winds when they blow are hot and laden with dust; exercise can only be taken very sparingly. The houses suffer from want of ventilation. All day long doors and shutters are closed to keep the interiors dark and cool: and what the rooms gain in one way they lose in another. When the sun goes down doors and windows are thrown open and you breathe more freely; but the daily experience of a shut-up house is trying.

At present the resources of the Karroo are limited, but the day will come when it will be a great invalid resort; a boon to the world; a delightful health-restoring sojourn; summer and winter having each its charm; summer on the mountain heights, winter in the plains. Thus the work of restoration may go on uninterruptedly in the same air—a great matter to an invalid. To change the air during the process of recovery is often as great an evil as changing your doctor; progress is arrested, ground lost. Life here may pass very pleasantly. In summer the whole day may be spent in a shady verandah, or in a hammock slung between trees. When the sun goes down, exercise may be taken; whilst in winter long walks are both possible and delightful. Food is generally cheap and good, but suffers from a want of variety. "Always a feast or a famine" is a South African proverb especially applicable to the Karroo: though supplies never quite fail. In these "tinned" days, too, one may easily cater for a regiment in a desert; the empty cupboard is a bygone dream sacred to Mrs. Hubbard. Houses are chiefly built in the plains, but presently they will creep up the mountain sides. The

future is full of resources; of things to come; of wonders and miracles of life. The world grows younger every day.

Through such country we travelled hour after hour. We left Bloemfontein in the afternoon, and presently the sun went down, and we passed through all the glories of sunset. Night fell and the stars



TRAVELLING IN THE OLD DAYS.

came out with that lustrous brilliancy that in this wonderful air gives them a singular look of suspension, as though they were orbs of liquid silver simply floating through space. Then once more came sunrise changing the wide plains into life and colouring, flooding the skies with gold.

The day wore on, and again night fell. Hungry as hunters, we

longed for Matjesfontein, where everyone dined. The fame of its refreshment-room has spread throughout South Africa. We looked for a banquet choice and rare: fish and flesh and fowl and fruit. Again it was a Barmecide feast. The master was away, and the men had taken the favourable opportunity of indulging in strong waters, and with fixed insane smiles placed empty plates before us and handed us empty dishes. At first the passengers thought it a little impromptu comedy, silly and out of place, and when they found their error, the language some indulged in was far more suited to tragedy. It was rather a cruel disappointment, especially to those on their way to Cape Town, with a long night journey before them.

Ours was nearly over. At eleven o'clock we reached Touw's River, and here stayed the night. Few lights were on the platform, and the darkness was Egyptian. No one else left the train. Blinds were all down, lights were shaded; the carriages looked dark and sleeping and mysterious. On the platform we found a forlorn young man bound for Bloemfontein. He appeared one of those not destined by nature to knock about the world; seemed rather lost and bewildered as he fixed his melancholy gaze upon his luggage under the flickering solitary oil lamp. We somehow felt for him; there was a gentle atmosphere about him not in keeping with those who have to "rough it in the bush." He looked at us rather appealingly; and the look seemed almost a supplication to take him under our wing and restore him to the green pastures of his native England. Then as in a dream, he moved towards the train and was about to open a door. Something prompted us to say, "Where are you bound for?"

"Bloemfontein," he replied, in tones as repressed as his look was melancholy.

"But this is going to Cape Town, away from Bloemfontein."

"I came from Cape Town yesterday," he dreamily said; "but I felt ill and sad and got out here—such a funny place—so depressing—and have managed to exist for twenty-four hours. The station-master told me the next train coming in would be my train. This is the next train."

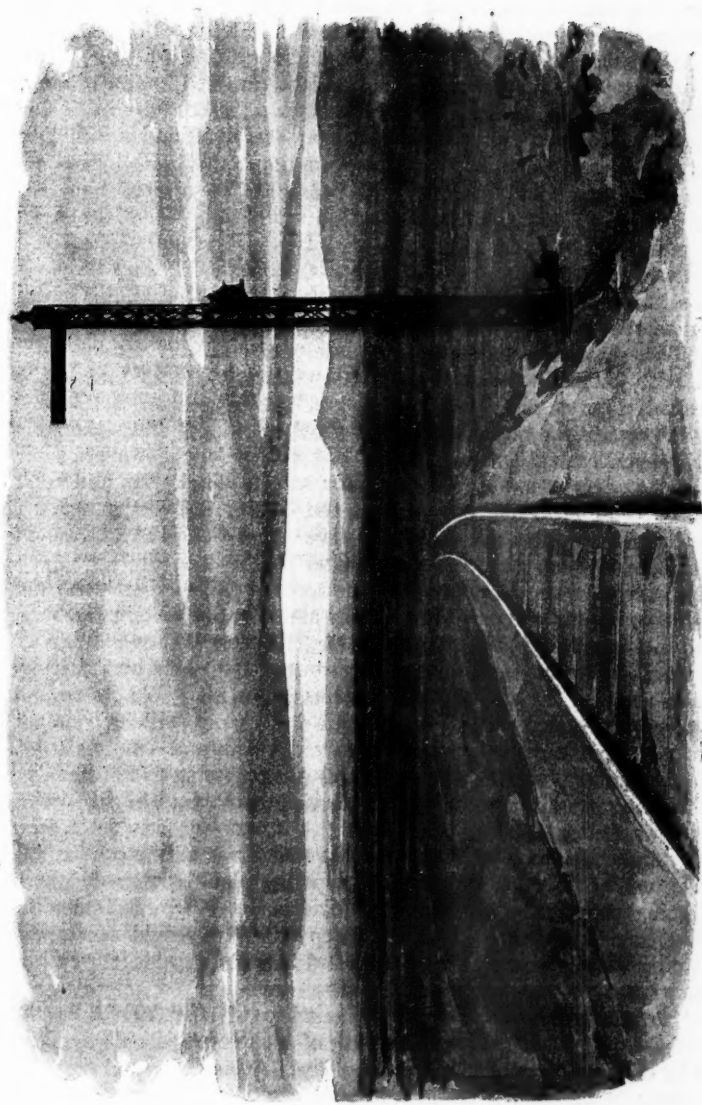
"The next train coming in the other way," we returned. "The station-master concluded you would understand that. This would only take you back to Cape Town."

"I shouldn't much care," he said. "They told me I must come out here for three or four years; said I couldn't live in England; but I think I would almost rather die at home than live in this exile."

"Take courage," we answered. "In a short time you will think differently. Bloemfontein is a peasant little place. You will make friends there; health will return; at the end of three years you will want to make it your home."

In about ten minutes the Cape train moved out, the Bloemfontein train came in, and we saw him comfortably placed in an empty compartment.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out a thin white hand, and smiling



THE LONE, LONE LAND.

for the first time. "You have quite brightened me up. I feel more hopeful. Couldn't you manage to change your plans and go back to Bloemfontein? It would be such a happiness."

As this was indeed impossible the train steamed off without us. We were left alone on the platform. Light streamed from a window, and we made for it—the bar of the little refreshment-room. The station-master—who was also hotel-keeper—stood behind it, counting out his money, like the king in his counting-house. He looked up startled. "Lost your train?" he cried. But we assured him that we were not such bad travellers. We were staying here the night in order to go through the wonderful Hex Valley by daylight. He was very civil and obliging. "Well, sirs, I will do my best for you," he said. "You will find it rather rough accommodation, but clean and wholesome. Would you like some tea before turning in?"

"We should indeed, and something to eat with it," we returned. "At Matjesfontein the waiters had taken too much, and no doubt the cook also, for we dined off empty dishes."

"Poor fare for hungry travellers," he laughed. "When the cat's away—you know the rest, sir. Mr. Logan's in Cape Town on some business of his own. A very particular man, is Mr. Logan, and won't he be wild when he comes back and hears what's happened. I expect those waiters will find they have taken their last carouse in Matjesfontein—at their master's expense."

The next person to appear upon the scene was an old woman; not so hideous as the one that had given us nightmare at Pietermaritzburg, and not sable; but an eccentric character nevertheless. With an expression that would have been dangerous accompanied by a carving-knife, she took up a candle and bade us follow her. We did so, not exactly through halls of Eblis. First a long room, with every mark about it of recent occupation—scattered chairs and empty glasses. Then a kitchen, whose presiding genius was preparing us refreshment. Then the open air, and darkness made visible by the rushlight; weird shadows flitting about like giant bats. On went our conductor, with a determined step. "Look where you walk," was all the caution she gave us, as we blindly stumbled upon a plank stretched over a yawning precipice. The plank was twelve feet long, one foot wide, the precipice might be 5000 feet deep for all we could see of the bottom. All the dreadful stories we had heard of wayside inns rushed to our memory.

"Prepare for danger," we whispered to H. "Armed to the teeth," he returned, grasping the hilt of his Norwegian dagger, just as he did that first night in the Cape Town Avenue.

After what seemed an interminable journey through space and darkness, we reached another building and were ushered into an enormous room, which looked innocent enough. No sign of trap-doors or panelled walls. "This is all new," our duenna condescended to explain, and now that we stood face to face, her ferocity



seemed to evaporate, and quite a kindly look came into her eyes. "South Africa is growing; we must grow too," she briefly continued. "Capital rooms; all good seasoned wood. Off to-morrow morning, I suppose, to see the Hex River. I've seen it a hundred times; quite sick of it. Must call you at daylight. Mind the precipice as you come back for your tea."

A caution we did not fail to observe. Yet when we reached it, the old woman loomed out of the darkness like a startling apparition. She had waited to pilot us across in the goodness of her old heart. Evidently there was to be no work to-night for the Norwegian dagger.

Nevertheless our night at Touw's River was an experience which left behind it a weird and curious impression, perhaps because we arrived in darkness and left it with the first glimmer of dawn. To us it was a land of shadows. We saw nothing but outlines. All interiors were bare and uncomfortable, our bedroom excepted. We felt at the ends of the earth. Nothing was civilised excepting the station-master, who atoned for all shortcomings. No wonder the poor invalid for Bloemfontein had found a twenty-four hours' stay depressing. And yet by daylight we should probably have found much to interest us.

The next morning arrived too soon. The old woman was true to her word, and before the shades of night had dispersed beat a veritable devil's tattoo upon our door. H. from his far-off corner sprang up, shouting, "The soldiers are on us!" He was dreaming it was another Zulu war. We bridged the precipice safely and found that the good old creature had prepared us a capital breakfast. How different from our experience at East London, at Standerton, at Johannesburg. Then the train came up, and we said good-bye to Touw's River and entered upon our very last journey in South Africa.

It was a fresh and glorious morning. The sun had risen, the sky was beautiful with many colours. There was no sign of mist in the sparkling atmosphere. Soon we reached the Hex River Station, from which point began the wonderful scenery; the descent of the train into the Hex River Valley. We had seen nothing to approach it in all our South African wanderings. Probably South Africa has nothing elsewhere to compare with it, and it possesses the merit of being accessible, for a few hours from Cape Town will take you through all. After this—travelling upwards—the country changes to the comparatively flat and commonplace, and remains so right on to Bloemfontein and Johannesburg, as though Nature had exhausted itself in one grand effort.

The way to enjoy the scene to perfection in going downwards is to have a chair placed in front of the engine, which has a rail running round it for the purpose. You then have everything in front of you. Perhaps to us the wonders seemed a little exaggerated, for in all our previous experiences, from the day we left Durban, we had never

once seen anything to raise any great emotion. On reaching Hex River Station, the train was apparently upon the summit of a mountain. On the opposite side was another chain of mountains. Between the two chains lay wide-spreading valleys. We gazed into immense depths, and asked ourselves by what magic the train was to descend to their level. Gradually it made way. Zigzag paths seemed to flash here and there, as if lightning had struck them into existence. Along these the train slowly, slowly wound its way, like a serpent creeping cautiously to its prey. Sometimes round a sharp curve the carriages almost seemed to double upon each other. Very gradual was the descent. Often we appeared to be almost overhanging a precipice: the advance of another yard and over we must go. Then a sudden turn would open out a fresh zigzag and again slowly, slowly we made way: a very little way with each fresh zigzag. The very engine seemed to have a sense of danger and responsibility. A steady head and a straight course were necessary. It did its work well.

We had seldom felt so great a sense of vastness and space. The depths of the valleys seemed distant and intangible as a dream. A river ran far, far below. We saw it flashing in the sunshine, but could hear no sound of flowing waters. There were precipitous mountain sides; huge walls of barren rock; and others again that sloped more gradually, and were green and smiling. As we descended, so the mountains literally appeared to rise upwards, as though they would presently reach the clouds. We could not think them immovable as they had been for ages past. The scene was really sublime.

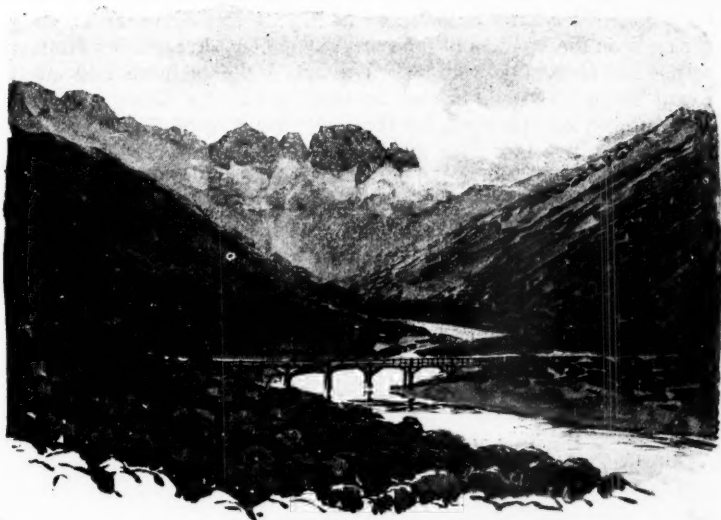
Nearing the level, we found care and cultivation; fields and orchards; picturesque farms, the homes of happiness and abundance, surrounded by waving trees, and gardens where flowers bloomed in gorgeous colouring. Down, down, down, until at last, the descent was accomplished, we hardly knew how, the train came to a standstill at Hex Valley Station. We drew a breath of relief that it was over; we gave a sigh of regret that it had not still to come. The one experience was not sufficient; we wanted twenty experiences. Half our mental impression had been absorbed in wonder and suspense.

At Hex Valley we stayed awhile as if the engine as well as its human freight must have breathing-time to recover from all this emotion. It was a very pleasant halt. On the mountain the air had been fresh and keen; in the valley it was warm and balmy; everything was luxuriant, emphatically sheltered from the world. The east wind might blow above, the north bring its sandstorms, they could not penetrate here. So it felt and seemed.

But the train at last went on and we with it. Valleys and mountains were left behind; the solitary short experience raising a great unsatisfied longing, was over. Once more we passed into the vast country of the plains: though more diversified by hills as we approached the region of Cape Town. Stations occurred more frequently; life

and activity became more visible ; many farm-houses : those picturesque, snow-white houses with jet-black roofs, that stand out so conspicuously in the landscape. Lovely baskets of fruit were offered us at the stations, for which very modest sums were asked. We were evidently approaching enterprise and civilisation.

In due time we entered the plains of Stellenbosch. Rising before us in a vast, magnificent amphitheatre, were the wonderful hills with their jagged and peculiar outlines, reminding us a little of the still more irregular Dolomites. Immediately we again saw as in a dream the pleasant day we had spent with the Dutch minister. It seemed quite far-off, so much had we seen since, so far had we journeyed. We saw once more the wide streets with their



HEX RIVER VALLEY.

ancient and spreading oak trees, many no doubt flourishing when the town sprang into existence two centuries ago, and was named after its first Dutch governor Van der Stell, and his fair Dutch wife Mademoiselle Bosch. Again we saw the flowing streams which enliven the town and make musical the air ; the white-walled churches, surrounded by spreading branches that overshadow the windows, and give to the interiors the dim religious light supposed to attune the mind to devotion. Once more we sat in the minister's Garden of Eden, and beneath his own spreading branches luxuriated in piled-up dishes of grapes that even Caleb and Joshua might have carried off as specimens. The train slowly steamed into the station, and we looked out, almost expecting that some mesmeric influence would bring the

minister to the platform to greet our return and give us a God-speed on passing away for ever from these distant latitudes. We searched up and down, but not even his ghost was in attendance. Our human possibilities are limited. Nothing met our gaze but the jagged mountains, beneath whose shadow he was probably even then reposing. We steamed away again with a great regret. That Arcadian day we had spent would never repeat itself : that special Paradise to us was closed for ever.

We passed into the immediate suburbs of Cape Town, Table Mountain loomed up in the distance, and quite a homelike feeling crept over us as we once more traced its curious formation. It seemed a year rather than a month since we had seen it slowly disappearing as we stood on the decks of the *Dunottar*. There rose the white Observatory in which we had spent so pleasant an evening, gazing upon the wonders of the starry sky. One after another familiar scenes and objects opened up. We traced the path we had taken round Table Mountain in that memorable Victoria Drive. Beyond that (turning, out of sight, lay the rich vineyards of Constantia, the wonderful cellars that year after year groan with the burden of their delicious freight. We remembered all the wealth of Nature all the magnificence of the rocky coast, all the clear pools filled with exquisite sea anemones—everything that had charmed our first days in Cape Town. In the wide plain between us and the mountain the town slept, a huge cluster of white, flat-roofed houses, where life, compared with the fever of Johannesburg, passes in a very even tenor.

Finally the train entered the station and drew up at the platform. Our travels in South Africa were over.

It was not without regret that we once more found ourselves in the wide uneven streets of Cape Town, with nothing between us and England but the long sea voyage. We had seen much, but we had seen it hurriedly, and for want of time had left many things undone. Still it had been a very pleasant experience. The very next day we were to sail homewards.

We spent the remaining hours as such hours always are spent ; in returning to old familiar spots for a farewell gaze ; in saying good-bye to friends newly made, but not for that reason to be forgotten ; in visiting shops and buying up curiosities of the country : horns and feathers, and skins : a hundred things that presently become white elephants leading to repentance. In her old familiar bearings lay the *Dunottar*. Everything about her looked in a state of suppressed excitement and expectation. Cab after cab kept drawing up laden outside with piles of luggage, with eager travellers anxious or hopeful, according as the world fared with them. Some were returning millionaires who had gone out with pockets lightly weighted. With others it was just the other way. *La main heureuse* is not given to all, as we have already remarked. "Have nothing to do with an unlucky



WINE FARM, CONSTANTIA.

man," said the founder of the House of Rothschild, of which numerous family he was certainly not a member.

Everything about the *Dunottar* was in a state of activity; the gangways were besieged; to us it was a depressing influence, a farewell to repose, a return to the commonplace elements of life. Nothing was improved by the fact that the vessel was *coaling*, and everything was adorned with a charming layer of black dust. But even that sable ceremony came to an end, like the hours of the last day.

At ten o'clock, when darkness had fallen and the stars were out, the final word was given; gangways were withdrawn, ropes slackened, slowly, slowly we moved away from the quay. The lock gates were opened, and as on a memorable night we had passed in, so now we passed out for the last time. A tremendous shout went up from those on land, echoed by those on board. It was a last good-bye. The lights of the town and the harbour shone out as we receded. Dimly the gigantic outlines of Table Mountain loomed up against the dark night sky. The good ship was fairly under way; South Africa was a thing of the past. As we stood on the bridge—our old spot—thought upon thought crowded upon our memory. Presently eight bells rang out—a new day had begun.

And it was a new world we were leaving behind us. A world of inexhaustible industry and wealth, full of capabilities and resources, where by-and-by almost the impossible may be compassed; such an El Dorado as never yet existed. It is not easy to overrate the future of South Africa. The land is flowing with milk and honey, and neither America nor any other country has possessed in such abundance the elements of permanent prosperity. The Argentine Republic ought to be great and wealthy, mighty and powerful, but her foes are they of her own household, and she must await "A New Republic" that will turn from the evil ways of the old. Then she too may become great. South Africa has none of this to contend with. She is honest and upright, and if she is only true to herself—as no doubt she will be—presently she will grow into a mighty power towards whom the gaze of the world will turn with envious admiration. Much of Europe seems to be growing old; over-population appears to be journeying hand in hand with diminishing resources—a *vice versa* state of affairs—and it may quite possibly be that South Africa is destined to be the future antidote for this great evil. It is at any rate certain that whilst the whole civilised world has been suffering from a disastrous commercial crisis, she has steadily progressed upwards, her days and years marked by advancing prosperity. Her people have every reason to be happy and contented, for they are laying a good foundation for the time to come; for the sons and daughters of posterity who shall grow up as young plants and polished corners of the temple.

All seemed clearly mapped out before us as we stood on the bridge of the *Dunottar*, and the good ship ploughed through the smooth waters



of the ocean, and eight bells proclaimed midnight and a new day. Above, the stars shone brightly and seemed to shed down their benediction upon the land whose outlines we could still faintly trace; and the earnest wishes for her welfare that we silently wafted upon the quiet air only helped to swell the volume of aspirations ever ascending for that desired end—a consummation devoutly to be wished.

Then up came Captain Robinson and scattered our thoughts to the winds, suggesting that star-gazing after midnight was destructive to



WINE CELLARS, CONSTANTIA.

the "hectic flush of health." But he did not practise what he preached; for we fell into a train of argument, and two bells struck and four bells struck, and still we stood upon the bridge; and the stars travelled westward, and the Southern Cross went down and the Southern Crown passed upwards: all steadily moving onwards like the lives of care-encumbered men. And every moment the good ship was taking us further and further away from this Land of Promise. Not for us these developing resources, but for a younger generation, and for generations yet unborn.

Our voyage was not destined to quite uninterrupted prosperity. On a certain day there came strange sounds from some part of her

machinery. Disguise it as they would, we read anxiety on the faces of the Captain and Chief Engineer. Then a whisper went abroad that there was a screw loose somewhere. These words are often spoken metaphorically in life; on this occasion they were to be taken literally. It was soon known that the screw of the *Dunottar* had gone wrong: her blades were loose.

One morning something happened. We had entered the Tropics; the heat was intense; we wondered whether we should live through it. For the first and only time we had forsaken the bridge and were lying in our deck chair in the stern of the ship. There the faintest suspicion of air came to us. We were alone, all the passengers having scattered; some to attend the daily auction, some to music, some to flirtations in quiet corners; some to soda and brandy, draughts taken regularly throughout the voyage at fifteen minutes' intervals as a precaution against low spirits.

Our chair was immediately over the screw. Suddenly there came a shock that shivered through the vessel; a report after which the dead silence was appalling. We were simply hurled out of the chair by the mere force of concussion of the nerves. Passengers hurried to and fro, pallor and agony upon their faces. One lady fell into hysterics, and only recovered to fall into them again at half-hour intervals during the day. The engines were stopped, and there came that dead silence and stillness which at sea seems like the suspension of life itself. A boat was lowered; the Captain, Chief Engineer and their satellites went round to examine the state of affairs. It was found that one of the blades had gone to the bottom of the sea. The concussion was caused by striking the side of the vessel as she wrenched away. The good ship had stood the blow and was none the worse. But the other blades were loose; she might not stand another blow; and though she did, if they all came off we should lose our power of motion, and have to toss about the Tropics until help came to us. If it never came we should have to sail about for ever like another phantom ship.

It was a serious and anxious moment. We were put down to quarter speed, and went through the Tropics at a solemn and funereal pace. The "Tropical agony" was proportionately prolonged, and day after day we seriously asked ourselves if we should live to see another sunrise. And this was the voyage supposed to be bracing to jaded nerves. Then there was the hourly suspense, wondering how the screw would behave, listening for another shock which should sound like the crack of doom. There were strange sounds in the neighbourhood of the screw; inequalities, irregularities in the workings; ominous bumpings which told of increased loosening of the blades. Every morning it was no longer the polite inquiry, "How have you slept?" but a hurried, anxious, terrified, whispered, "Did you hear the screw in the night?"

Finally, one Sunday morning we came to an anchor at Goree, the

port formed by the land of Cape Verde—the port of Senegal. It was an intensely hot and glowing day. We almost felt as if we were in the centre of the sun itself. No one had even energy enough to use a fan. In front of us, a mile or so distant was the island, its parched shores looking beautiful and green and cool and refreshing to our sea-accustomed eyes. There was a very Dutch look about the harbour and the houses upon the rising hill; a wonderful tone; everything seemed steeped in a glorious golden haze: "Quite a 'Clara Montalba' effect," said Captain Robinson. From the distance it looked like fairyland, not like an earthly scene; here one might bask in eternal sunshine, and eat the lotus flower. It was a divergence from our course, but one never to be regretted. It all now seems to us as a dream, the more so perhaps that we only saw it from a distance.

Captain Robinson and a few others in authority went ashore; and after a charming visit on land, to which the passengers were not admitted (it would have been difficult to land 400 people in small boats), they returned with a diver and some of the great people of the place, habited in swords and cocked hats. I do not mean to imply that they were cannibals and wore nothing else, in spite of the Tropical heat. The diver was a man of colour, but also a man of energy. He dived without apparatus, and stayed under water for a good three minutes, tightening a screw; then came up to breathe and went back for another three minutes to tighten another screw. And so he went on for a long time, until all the blades had been tightened, and there seemed every chance of their now holding.

After a halt of some six or eight hours we continued our journey; still at half speed. Nothing more happened. In due time we reached Madeira, and went through all our old experiences. And here, as the good ship sailed again on her homeward way, letters and telegrams were placed in our hands, and their burden was sad and sorrowful. One near and dear had fallen ill and counted the days and watched and longed for our return: only to pass out of life even before we touched Madeira. In our imagination the vessel for the remainder of the voyage was draped in black and the ensign was half-mast high. The eyes of a brother most dear and most beloved, ever wont to light up at our approach, had closed for ever upon the world. Again with cruel force rang out in our ears the saying of the wise Eastern king: THIS ALSO SHALL PASS AWAY. But the good ship went onwards, unmindful of the sorrows of mankind. In due time the white cliffs of old England loomed up, and the *Dunottar* steered into the beauties and shelter of Plymouth harbour. Here nearly all her passengers forsook the vessel, but we preferred to go up channel, pass into the Thames, and part from her where we had first joined—at Blackwall. Arrived at her destination, she steered slowly through the docks to her moorings, and we bade her a long farewell.

I am writing to you from a remote little town in Brittany. In

some ways it reminds us of South Africa, excepting that here we have a few traces of old-world architecture: houses with wonderful roofs and windows and gabled ends, which drive one distracted and make one long for days of leisure and the pencil of a Turner. But they are only occasional, and the general aspect of the place is somewhat new and fresh. Our inn is delightfully primitive. Only a short time ago and it did not exist. The walls are still damp, and a scent of fresh mortar yet clings to them. Everything is of snow-white purity. Our host and hostess are very unworldly and unsophisticated. It seems impossible that they can ever have wisdom enough to make both ends meet. The good woman is huge and clumsy, a true *Bretonne Bretonnante*, with a very alien French accent, but honest and straightforward as the day. We have to rough it here quite as much as in any place in South Africa, but it is charmingly quiet; there is no disturbing element, no aggressive human influence. It is not many days since we landed in England. We have fled to our beloved Brittany, partly to refresh ourselves with a little old-world life and architecture; partly to escape from sorrow. We are haunted by the sound of a voice that is stilled; by eyes looking and longing in vain for our home-coming, and closing for ever in the "pain of unfulfilled desire."

We have had a long day's drive through lovely scenes in the heart of the Morbihan; blue skies and clear air and many pine trees have surrounded us; perhaps this is one reason why to-night we are specially haunted by our South African experiences, which seem to pass and repass before us in a series of panoramic pictures. If there was anything in those experiences that jarred it is forgotten; only the pleasant remains, and over all is spread the gentle glamour that ever surrounds the past.

Care Amice, as far as South Africa is concerned, the pen falls from the hand. But many details and the conclusion of the whole matter are reserved for that day when we shall meet "face to face and clasp hands close and fast." To that end advance the hour, for we live in a world wherein we know not what a day may bring forth, and it behoves us to remember the going down of the sun.

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## THE BODKIN LETTER.

## A CHRISTMAS STORY.

IT was a letter addressed, "Signor A. Bodkin, Poste Restante, Florence," which arrived one morning in that interesting city, and was placed in the second pigeon-hole in company with the other B's to await the claimant. The claimants turned out to be two. When the hour of distribution arrived, and all the people, native and foreign, who choose to have their letters left in the post-office instead of having them delivered at their houses, and they are a good number in Italy, entered the large square court and gathered round the window of that department, a tall young Englishman of fair ruddy complexion, with dark hair and dark grey eyes, pushed forward impatiently. The official, who was serving the public in a leisurely manner, took no notice of him, and the people who stood round gave him to understand that everyone must wait his turn. In the meantime another young man, who was before him and closer to the window, asked for his mail. The clerk threw out a letter on the marble sill which serves as a bulwark to keep the public at a little distance. The young man was about to seize it, but the tall Englishman, who read the address over his shoulder, stretched out his arm and laid a large forefinger on the letter, saying—

"Excuse me, this is mine."

"But, no, signore," said the Italian in apparent surprise. "It is mine. Look at the name!"

And he turned the letter towards the other, but held on to the end of it.

"I see the name, signore," returned the Englishman with a pleasant smile. "It is my name."

"Bodkin!" exclaimed the Italian—pronouncing it *Bodkeen*—"it is my name."

"There must be some mistake, signore, or you are jesting. No Italian ever was born with that name, and very few Englishmen. In fact it belongs to only one family in the United Kingdom, an Anglo-Irish family. I dare swear that there is not another man in Italy called Bodkin."

"*Caro Signore mio*, excuse me, but the name is mine. I am Amedeo Bodkin."

"Impossible, my dear sir, impossible!" exclaimed the Englishman with an incredulous smile. "This is an elaborate pleasantry," he added relapsing into English, "and I want my letter."

At this point the clerk, who had been listening to the dispute and neglecting his duties, said :

"Let me see the post-mark," and took the letter in his hand. "It has the head of her Majesty Queen Victoria, and is stamped London. Are you from London, signore?" he asked of the Englishman.

"No, but I have correspondents there."

"And I also," said the Italian; "I have some friends there."

"That letter is mine; give it me, please," said the Irish Bodkin, growing irate.

"It is mine, and I insist on having it!" said the Italian Bodkin with corresponding heat.

"What proof can you give of your identity?" asked the clerk of the Irishman. "Have you any acquaintance in the post-office who will recognise you as the Mr. Bodkin?"

"*Bodkin*, not *Bodkeen*," corrected the Irishman. "I am a stranger. But here are my visiting-cards, and a letter received at Milan."

"This letter," said the clerk, with the solemn air of a judge on the bench, "is addressed *A. Bodkin, Esq.*, while the one in the dispute is *Signor A. Bodkin*."

"Oh, that means nothing; some of my friends write *Signor* because I am in Italy."

"And have *you* any acquaintance here to prove your identity?"—to the Italian.

"Not in the post-office, but I have been in Florence three weeks and I have been here before for letters."

"I do not remember you. I cannot give this letter to either of you gentlemen until you bring someone to testify who you are."

And he replaced the letter in its pigeon-hole and attended to the patient Florentines who had been kept waiting for a considerable time. When the litigants saw the coveted epistle disappearing from view, they became very angry and stormed at the clerk who, safe behind his official bulwarks, only smiled at their rage, and proceeded with his business. They were pushed away from the window by the crowd, and then they turned on one another. The Italian, gesticulating with his small brown hands and speaking in a very exciting tone, insisted that the letter belonged to him, and he would bring evidence enough to procure it. The Irishman stood on the uniqueness of his name; he would not consent to the idea that anyone could bear it except one of his own stock, much less a foreigner.

"The Bodkins of the County Galway are *the only* Bodkins in the Kingdom—in the world. Of course they have multiplied and scattered somewhat in the course of ages, for they are a very ancient race. There is a popular song which says,

‘The Bodkins sneeze  
At the grim Chinese.’

which serves to show how well known is the long descent of the family."

The Italian, though still angry, could hardly suppress a smile, for



he knew English well, and they had dropped into that language when they found themselves *tête-à-tête*.

"Your family may be as old as the deluge, and you may have a right to sneeze at Noah, if that is the custom of your aristocracy; I do not dispute your pretensions, sir; I am not interested in genealogy. But what I do know is, that I have a perfect right to the name; I have come by it honestly, and I shall not surrender it at the bidding of any man."

"Sir, do you mean to insinuate that I have not a lawful right to the name of Bodkin?" demanded the other.

The Italian shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hand.

"I know nothing whatever about you."

"I do not expect you to know about me or my family. They do not travel; I have knocked about the world a great deal, and I have never encountered a Bodkin except myself."

The Italian was again provoked to smile slightly at the Irish bull. Then he said, more quietly:

"I want my letter."

"My letter, you mean. Look here, it is time to put an end to this nonsense. If not, I shall have recourse to the English consul."

"The English consul cannot make me give up my name," said the Italian.

"Your name, forsooth! This is a strange hallucination of yours. Who ever heard of an Italian Bodkin since the world began?"

"Sir," said the Italian, flushing to the roots of his hair, "you must unsay those insulting words, or else——"

"Or else? What is the alternative?"

"You must fight. Here is my card. I shall send a friend to your hotel."

The Irishman seemed much surprised. He took the card, read on it the simple name, *Amedeo Bodkin*. Then he looked with a curious interest from the card to the young man for a minute or two. His anger seemed to have evaporated. He pulled out his pocket-book, took a card, and scribbled the name of his hotel and the hour he should be found there.

"Here is my card, and you see my name; it is a respectable name, and I cannot afford to give it up, particularly as my father left me little else. If, therefore, you insist on fighting for it, I'm your man.

'I ne'er delayed

When foeman bade me draw my blade.'

It is true I am rather out of practice, not having fought a duel for a hundred years—I mean, of course, our people. Before the Union there used to be a duel almost every day in Phenix Park, but now it is unlawful."

"And do you Irish care about the law in such a matter when your honour is concerned?"

"Strange as it may seem, we have taken to observe the law in that particular. As for honour, why, it has got to take care of itself—and it does somehow," returned the Irishman, in a pleasant conversational tone. "I was just about to remark that I never served, even in the Militia, so I do not know how to handle a sword; but I am a *capital shot*." And he eyed his adversary closely.

"You have your choice of weapons," returned the Italian, calmly. "I have the honour to wish you good morning, sir."

"Good morning, sir," replied the other, and they separated.

Later in the day a friend of the Italian Bodkin waited on the Irish Bodkin to arrange a meeting at the dawn, so as to evade the *carabinieri*, who have a way of turning up on the ground as if they had been sent for, and conveying the combatants before a magistrate. It is the duty of a second to try to arrange the difference before proceeding to extremes, so that this one testified that his principal was really called Bodkin, that his family had been Italian for three generations. The young man remembered his grandfather, who had made money in Australia, and was in very good circumstances, but he had taken to painting as a profession. The youth's father was a learned man and a professor in a public school. He lost his patrimony by a bad investment, and died poor. The son was a teacher in the elementary government schools, and was the chief support of his mother and sister. He gave lessons in the evening to the *forestieri*, chiefly English people. He was a clever fellow, and burned the midnight oil in study.

Alexander Bodkin drew out this story by questions, and showing by his manner a friendly interest in the family history of his namesake.

"All this is very interesting," he said. "And he has a mother and sister dependent on him?"

"The sister teaches also, and earns enough to dress herself; but when a bad year comes and lessons are few, then both are short. The mother is a constant invalid, and they save all they can for her—to take her to the mineral baths in summer and make her comfortable. They love her very much."

"I should like to have a talk with your friend," said Alexander.

"But you are going to fight?"

"It would be quite incorrect in that case, I know; but I do not intend to fight. It is all nonsense, and I felt inclined to roar when he proposed it, it was so absurd; but I humoured his whim for the fun of the thing. Let us go forth and visit my namesake."

The friend took his hat with a pleased smile, content with his ability as a diplomatist. They walked in silence, Alexander Bodkin ruminating on the family history. He called to mind that two younger brothers of his grandfather had gone to Australia when mere youths. They had ceased to write home after their parents dropped off, and were believed to be dead long before their grand-nephew

Alexander was born. And now, by the merest chance, he had come upon a trace of one of his grand-uncles, had encountered his descendant, and was near fighting him for the right to bear his name.

It was a bitterly cold day, and "the north wind seemed to be blowing from all points," as Alexander remarked to his guide in his inconsequent Irish way, regardless of sense and science.

"What would you?" said the Italian, apologetically. "We must remember that we are in the heart of winter. This is Christmas Eve."

"Oh, I am not complaining," returned Bodkin cheerfully; "I am accustomed to a worse wind—a wind that would take the hair of your head out by the roots, and oaktrees in the same manner. But you are walking in the middle of the street. To be sure it is just as clean as the side walk, but the carriages make it slightly inconvenient."

"I always walk in the middle of the street," returned the Italian, "since I have had two narrow escapes of my life by walking on the footway."

"Brigands?" suggested the Irishman.

"We have no brigands in our cities," returned the Italian. "No, it is the fatal tendency people have to throw themselves down from third-storey windows that makes life uncertain for the passer-by. I fear they would make me cold as well as themselves. Here we are at our friend's door. His flat is on the third storey: you will see his name beside the door-bell. *A rivederla.*"

Alexander mounted the long flights of dark stone stairs, which were common to six families, and at last reached the third floor, and read on the plate with a strange sensation the "unique name" of Bodkin, which he had flattered himself was peculiar to his race. The door was opened by a young girl, very plainly dressed, but lady-like looking. She was a pale brunette with beautiful raven hair twisted in heavy coils at the back of her small head. She showed the visitor into a *salottino*, and said she would advise her brother of his presence. It was a small room with white muslin curtains and bare brick floor. In front of the sofa was a square of carpet, and round this in a circle were ranged several chairs, so that all the company might share the bit of carpet.

Our traveller glanced his quick eye round the room and saw genteel poverty written on every object. What struck him most was the number of books and the handsome binding of some of them which he saw in a large bookcase and lying on the table. He opened one or two and found they were presents from English friends and pupils.

In a few minutes the door opened and his adversary entered. He was like his sister, delicately pale, that fine clear palor which suggests a student's life. He had brown eyes and a broad square forehead, with dark hair standing straight up, like King Humbert's; he was of middle stature, slight and thin, well dressed in dark unobtrusive colours. The stranger, as soon as he saw him, advanced smiling and said:

"I beg your pardon for my rudeness this morning," and offered his hand, which the Italian took with great cordiality.

"I not only acknowledge your right to the name which I had hitherto believed the exclusive possession of my family, but I am come to claim you as a kinsman. I have good reason to believe that we are related."

"My dear sir, I am pleased and flattered to hear it. But how? pray be seated."

"Tell me all you know about your family history," said Alexander, seating himself on the sofa and stretching out his long legs to the centre of the carpet, while his host drew an easy-chair in front of him, and they took a long look at each other. The Italian then related more circumstantially what we have already heard about his Australian grandfather, Alexander listening attentively; he then told his story, which dove-tailed into the imperfect sketch he had just heard. The departure of the two boys sixty years before, moved thereto by the growing poverty of the dwindling estate, the number of sisters to be fortunated off it, and the spirit of adventure so strong in English youths, had been a family tradition which his aunts had often repeated. Their names were Alexander and Oliver.

"Oliver was my grandfather," said Amedeo. "There is no longer any doubt about our common ancestry." And he took another long look at his visitor. He was a handsome fellow with a blooming complexion, white and rosy, dark wavy hair, dark arched eyebrows, and those peculiar eyes which are called "Irish grey," with large pupils and a changing light in them. It struck Amedeo that there was something familiar to him in his face. The Irishman bore the scrutiny with a pleasant smile, and then said in his soft mellow voice with a certain accent which betrayed his nationality, though not what could be called a brogue.

"Well, do you like me for a cousin?"

"Very much indeed," replied the other laughing, and holding out his hand, which Alexander grasped warmly.

"Now I'll tell you all about myself," he said confidentially. "I belong to that unhappy class called distressed Irish landlords. The land has gone down in value by degrees—wants capital to improve it—no money to be had—tenants miserably poor—won't pay up—I won't press the poor devils. I have to live as economically as I can, chiefly on the continent, where one gets more for one's money than at home, and the sunshine gratis. The old place is delightful in summer; though the house is shabby, it is still comfortable. I have two dear old aunts who live there always, because they have hardly any other provision, and they keep house for me. I am a poor devil, and I don't mind telling you, my cousin, that I am anxious to get hold of that letter which may have a remittance from my solicitor who is at present in London (the hand seemed like his), because I am in low water at present."

"I should propose to go at once for the letter," replied Amedeo, "but I fear it is now too late; being Christmas Eve the office will be closed. We can go together to-morrow morning."

It was now dark; Amedeo lighted a lamp that stood on a cabinet, and placed it in the middle of the table. They fell into a discursive talk on literature, travels, and other subjects, but the personal note predominated, because they were interested in each other. Once when Alexander lamented his inability to redeem mortgaged land and do something for his people, Amedeo said with a smile:

"It would be easy for you to restore the prosperity of your house by marrying a bride with a handsome *dot*. They abound in England."

Alexander grew very red at this suggestion and laughed in an embarrassed manner, which made his cousin conclude that he had hit the nail on the head, and that he had an heiress in his eye; but what the Italian could not understand was why he should feel ashamed of such a very natural proceeding. Everybody he knew wanted to marry a *dot*; it was the dream of all the poor elegant young men of his acquaintance, to fascinate an American heiress, and they often reproached him for not making more of his opportunities when giving lessons to English and American ladies of fortune. But though he thought it a blameless thing for a poor man to look for money, his own poverty could not make Amedeo a fortune-hunter.

The Bodkin house was a small flat, and the kitchen was not so far off that the smell of hot soup could not penetrate to the little *salotto*. It was a cold room with a north aspect; there was no fire in the stove. The young man began to feel and look chilly. The smell of good hot *minestra* became more pungent; the dinner-hour had arrived. Alexander looked at his watch and said he must go. After a brief mental struggle Amedeo came to a momentous decision.

"Signor Alessandro, you have talked about your want of money; I have said nothing about my poverty, but it is self-evident; you see our mode of living. I am not ashamed of it, for I owe no man anything," he said smiling, and lifting his pale thin face to meet his tall friend's eyes, with something of a proud defiance in it.

"I wish I could say the same, my dear fellow; but it is hard to keep out of debt in these bad times."

They both began to laugh.

"The meaning of this preface is that I should like to ask you to dine, instead of letting you go away on this cold night to your hotel; but our fare is poor and mean compared with what you are accustomed to; still, if you would be so kind and friendly as to excuse all deficiencies——"

"My dear fellow, I shall be only too happy to make the acquaintance of your family; and I trust you will not treat me as a

stranger. The ladies will excuse my dress," looking at his rough grey suit.

Amedeo laughed.

"Don't imagine we dress for dinner," he said. "Excuse me for a moment; I must tell my mother."

Alexander, left alone, looked at himself in the glass over the mantelpiece, and combed back his wavy brown hair and moustache with a little pocket-comb. He divined something of his friend's pecuniary circumstances, for he was observant and sympathetic; but he was too much of a stranger to him and to the ways of the poor Italians to know the full depth of the poverty of government employés. Forty pounds a year is considered a high salary for a teacher in the national board schools, and Amedeo, being still young, had not yet attained to that, so that the maintenance of the household depended much on the foreign pupils in winter. He and his sister, like all their class, managed to dress respectably, but to do so comfort in other ways had to be sacrificed to an extent which English travellers could hardly understand. People in their position never entertain; every man eats at home and meets his friends at the café or club. Alexander, accustomed to the rough plenty of an Irish country house, where an unceremonious hospitality was the rule, had no notion what it cost this proud reserved Italian to break down the barriers which concealed the domestic misery, and admit a stranger to spy out the poverty of the land. But Amedeo was, after all, of Irish blood; the claim of kinship was strong, and Alexander had a personal fascination for him which had attracted him even when they were quarrelling over the letter. It was, however, difficult for him to reconcile his mother and sister to such an unlooked-for event as a visitor, and make them prepare for him in a few minutes. But Silvia would do anything to please her brother, and she was the housekeeper. She unlocked the wardrobe in the hall and got out her finest table linen (of that the poorest Tuscan has a good store), and went into the kitchen to help and direct the old servant in the culinary business. There was plenty of soup and maccaroni, but the meat that made the soup was a very small lump almost boiled away.

"The meat is not enough, Maria," said Silvia, contemplating it mournfully. "You must cut up the fowl at once and fry it on another fire."

"*Santa Madonna!*" cried the old dame aghast. "The chicken's for the *festa* to-morrow! *Signorina mia*, do you know what fowl costs at this season? You know it is only for a grand *festa* we can have it (only a bit for the Signora because she is ill), and to-morrow is Christmas Day!"

"Never mind, Maria. The case is urgent. It is a friend of my brother, and he is very hungry."

In a wonderfully short time the Signorina came to the *salotto* to announce dinner; having brushed her hair and changed her frock she



looked even brighter and fresher than on her first appearance. Her black dress was relieved by a soft creamy silk scarf round her neck tied in a bow in front. She had an ivory complexion, glossy black hair simply coiled at the back of her small graceful head, with tiny curling rings round her forehead and the nape of her neck, and black pencilled eyebrows; but when she raised her lashes the beholder was surprised to find instead of the black eyes he expected, a pair of soft serious grey ones.

The little dining-room was more comfortable than the *salottino*; there was a fire in the stove, and in an easy-chair near it sat a delicate old lady wrapped in a shawl, embracing a little brass *scaldino* full of red ashes, with both her colourless hands. She was tall and gaunt, her dark eyes looked out of caverns, and her abundant snow-white hair was covered with a little black lace kerchief. There was a certain air of puritanical simplicity about her which explained itself to Alexander when he learned that she was a true Waldensian from the Valle Pellice, whose family had been heroes and heroines in the bad old persecuting times. She was very clever and spoke both French and English well.

"Her children seemed devoted to her, so she must have something fine in her character," he concluded.

Alexander was presented as a relative, and was received cordially by the ladies; as they spoke English better than he spoke Italian the conversation was carried on in his own language, and as he was always at his ease, he made himself very amusing with his stories of his travels, anecdotes of famous persons, and his mimicry of eccentric acquaintances, which he rendered with a dramatic effect that made his entertainers laugh heartily.

The dinner consisted of large plates of soup and great slices of dark bread, a small quantity of boiled beef, and after that the famous fowl fried with cauliflower; then came salad and cheese, and it wound up with a cup of black coffee. They had also good red wine, but that had been a special flask procured for Christmas. The old woman in the kitchen shook her head ruefully over the empty dishes and

"Bitterly thought on the morrow,"

while the ringing laughter of the young people in the parlour resounded through the little house and made her reflect on the thoughtlessness and recklessness of youth.

Alexander, while entertaining his hosts, was not less entertained himself. He was amused and interested in watching an Italian interior of the middle class, and he found his cousins emphatically what the Italians call *simpatici*. He watched the Signorina taking down from the cupboard a dainty little service of antique china, arrange the cups on the table and pour out the coffee, which she had made herself with a spirit lamp, and he wished to help her, but

"from utter courtesy forbore."

Amedeo offered his visitor a cigar while they were still at table. Alexander glanced at the Signorina and asked if the smoke annoyed her. She assured him that she was accustomed to it and liked it, so they puffed away contentedly, while Signorina removed her coffee-cups, brought them back washed, and proceeded to hang them up in the cupboard. Alexander admired her quiet graceful movements and the simplicity of her manners.

"She is a nice sweet girl," he thought, and "would be pretty if she had a little more flesh on her bones. They all look thin and pale and under-fed."

Silvia sat down by the lamp with her muslin embroidery, and then the visitor could watch her more persistently without causing her any embarrassment. He admired her pretty head bent over her work, her fine black tresses, the delicate wax-like ear and throat, the small slender hands.

"Signorina," he said suddenly, as he was about to depart, "do you know that you remind me of one of my aunts? I cannot tell in what particular, but in some indefinable way you suggest her. You are a true Bodkin in spite of being grafted on a new stock."

The girl flushed, and her defect being want of colour she looked charming at that moment, with a sweet shy look in her dark grey eyes, which sometimes took a deep violet shade.

"What you say must be true," said Amedeo. "I never noticed it till now, but Silvia's eyes are just like yours. Is it not so, mother?"

The mother looked from one to the other and recognised the likeness. Alexander bowed and said, "You flatter me, my friends; but I am pleased that you find a resemblance between us. Our grandfathers were brothers; blood is thicker than water. Good-night, cousin Silvia!" and he gave her cold little hand a very warm pressure.

"Blood is thicker than water," he repeated to himself as he strode along the silent street. "That is a grand old lady, but I do not feel drawn towards her as toward the young people. They are awfully poor, yet so refined and cultivated; they interest me." He wondered they did not ask him for Christmas Day, and concluded that it was because they could not procure a handsome joint of roast-beef and a plum-pudding; but he did not suspect that having demolished the fowl and flask of Chianti there was nothing for to-morrow but bread and *minestra*. Still his thoughts kept playing round his new-found relatives, and he longed to have a home near to invite them and to give them an Irish welcome, with a pretty present for each.

"Can't you give them some presents here? And why not invite the whole family to your hotel and give them a good dinner to-morrow?" suggested something inside of Alexander who was always tempting him to extravagance.

"Ah, to be sure, old fellow, there you are at it again!" replied his other self. "I should be delighted—but the sinews of war are wanting. I must pay my hotel bill first. I ought to take a lesson

from that poor fellow who said he owed no man anything. It is vastly to his honour, I am sure, and it made me ashamed of myself. I must not be generous till I have something of my own."

In this humble frame of mind, our traveller mounted the stairs to his room and found on the table a letter forwarded from Milan. It contained a much-desired cheque from an editor to whom he had acted as "occasional correspondent" in his travels. "Oh, joy! I shall have the pleasure of giving the dinner to my poor relations after all!"

Christmas morning dawned bright and beautiful in the fair City of Flowers. The air was crisp, frosty and bracing; the sky was brilliantly blue, the Arno a clear green, the sun sparkling on the grand cathedral and its matchless campanile; the bells were ringing and all the fountains playing. The streets were full of citizens with their families in their best attire, going to or coming from church. At nine o'clock our two friends were on their way to the post-office armed with such credentials as would prove their claims to the letter. On the way Alexander told Amedeo of his little plan of taking the ladies for a drive in the park early in the afternoon, and then having them all to dinner in his hotel; and it was settled that they should meet them coming out of church to get their consent.

Arrived at the post-office they presented their credentials and intimated that they were agreed that one of them should open the letter on the spot. The clerk produced it; Amedeo put his hands in his pockets and nodded towards his friend. Alexander took it, and moving to one side out of the crowd opened it. He glanced down the first page, turned over, and read the second and third without uttering a syllable. Then he lifted his eyes and fixed Amedeo with a curious dumfounded look.

"What is the matter? Have you good or bad news?" asked the other.

"Come out in the piazza and let us have a talk," returned Alexander. "I don't know whether I am on my head or my heels. Do you remember your grandfather speaking of a brother who went to Australia with him?"

"Yes."

"Well, that brother of your grandfather and my grandfather has died in Australia at an advanced age, childless, leaving an immense fortune—the exact amount is not ascertained—to be divided between his nephew's children. He has also left legacies to my aunts. *We* are all the nephew's children alive—we are his heirs."

"Alessandro!"

"My dear fellow, I doubted my senses at first. Here is the letter; read, it concerns you as much as me; you have an equal interest in it."

Amedeo had grown red and pale by turns, and now his lip quivered and he bit it as he took the letter with trembling hand and

pretended to study the contents. Presently he thrust it back to Alexander and heaved a great sigh.

"There, take it; it is enough for me to know that a competency is assured to my poor mother and Silvia, a certainty of comfort for the rest of their lives. You do not know—you never could understand—what they have gone through—how much needed this is. Oh, thank God!"

He almost broke down. They were standing under the colonnade of the Uffizi Gallery just opposite the post-office; Alexander put his hand to Amedeo's shoulder and pushed him down on a stone bench. Then he took his hand and congratulated him warmly, and added: "I am as glad on your account as my own—I am, upon my honour."

Amedeo pressed his hand, but did not speak. Alexander then sat silent and still for a few minutes ruminating. By the overpowering effect of the joyful news on his friend he could measure the depth of the misery he had known, the worst part of which was probably the dread which haunts over-worked men of breaking down and leaving their womankind desolate, or being a helpless burden on somebody's charity. This weight was taken off his heart suddenly, and no wonder he felt stunned.

"Amedeo," he said aloud, "you are a capital fellow and I like you more and more. You have taught me a lesson on economy, too. I have hitherto been too careless and thoughtless; because I had not enough of money I did not put my one talent to good account. I am going to turn over a new leaf, and apply this fortune, which I have done nothing to earn, to the best purpose, I hope for the good of others. I feel a sense of responsibility about property which I never felt before. We owe something to posterity, though it is an incontrovertible fact that statement of Sir Paul Roche that posterity has never earned our gratitude by doing anything for us."

Amedeo stared somewhat bewildered.

"He was a countryman of mine who, when the claims of posterity were urged, asked what has posterity ever done for us? and every one was silenced by the remark."

Amedeo laughed, but in an agitated absent sort of way, and then said:

"This fortune will have a sobering effect on your wild spirits, I think. It is the right way to receive such a heaven-sent gift. And what have I done to deserve it either?"

"Ah, my friend, it is no use to try to conceal it from me, for you cannot! Your whole life is a continual sacrifice, and your present happiness is in nowise selfish—it is purely altruistic," said Alexander.

"If you had not been here that letter would not have come to Florence; they would not have known aught of me, and then—" said Amedeo, pausing.

"And if I had accepted your challenge to meet you this morning, the letter would have gone back to London probably, as I might be

lying stiff and cold, and then—! Ah, Amedeo! you have great reason to be thankful that you have not a dead man seated beside you on this bench."

"*Misericordia!*"

"Tell me now, on this Christmas morning," pursued Alexander in his serio-comic manner, "with all those sweet bells ringing, and the churches of all the different nations here singing 'Peace on earth and good will to men,' do you think it was a worthy act for a *galantuomo* to stain the earth with his brother's blood?"

"It would be villainous; but I did not intend to kill you."

"Only to 'wing me'? That would have been more cruel still."

"*Chè! chè!* I would not have hit you."

"Then this mode of defending your honour is a solemn farce, and ought to be laughed out of court. Yet I have heard of some fatal cases. You are a man of character, Amedeo, and you ought to set your face against this absurd practice. Promise me that you will."

"I would promise you anything, my dear Alexander, after the happy news you have brought me this day. And you don't mind sharing the fortune which would have been all yours only for these foreign cousins?" he said with a smile, looking the other in the face. But the frank, open, joyous expression of the handsome Irishman removed any lingering doubt he might have had.

"I tell you I am the happiest fellow alive, and would be even if the fortune were less than I am led to expect," he replied. "It removes the horrid necessity of marrying the heiress. Yes, you guessed truly, Amedeo: I was urged, pressed to make a convenient match, and there was one at hand which would settle all difficulties. But oh! the blessed day! I had not asked her. I put it off from time to time; now I am free, and I am almost beside myself with joy."

The two friends walked on, hardly feeling the ground under their feet so airy was their tread, till they reached the Waldensian church, where they met the Signora Bodkin and her daughter coming out. Alexander made haste to invite them for a drive in the *Cascine*, and afterwards to dine at his hotel, which they agreed to do, and then Amedeo, trembling with eagerness to impart his great news, called a cab and drove home with them.

Alexander, standing at the foot of the stairs when he alighted from the carriage at three o'clock, saw Amedeo giving his arm to his mother on the top of the last flight, and Silvia running before them with a shawl and a cushion. It seemed marvellous to him the effect of happiness upon that sweet creature. She appeared several years younger, and ever so much prettier than she had done last night. Her face was radiant, and her little feet hardly touched the steps as she flew down to the door.

"Signor Alessandro, I congratulate you, and I thank you!" she

said putting her hand in his, as he relieved her of her burden of shawls.

"Why thank me, cousin? The merit is not mine."

"Oh, you have brought good fortune with you!" she cried, "and you have been so kind about it all, so generous!"

"You regard me as a sort of fairy godfather, I suppose? All right; I must try to live up to that character," said Alexander, hastening to meet the Signora, and convey her to the carriage. Even her worn old face had lost some of its wrinkles and wore a happy smile; she walked more uprightly and seemed less afflicted with cold than before. It did him good to see all these signs of contentment in this amiable family; it put him in his pleasantest mood, and he entertained his guests during the drive with his brightest stories, and they, being in a holiday mood, were easily made laugh. It was not so much the matter, as the comic manner of relating things that amused them and charmed them. His droll smile was irresistible; the tones of his rich soft voice rolling his "r's" with Celtic energy, had a latent humour which predisposed the listeners to mirth.

Arrived at the Cascine the young people got out of the carriage, and wrapping their mother up in a heap of shawls, ordered the coachman to drive slowly along the sunny avenue by the Arno while they walked ahead under the trees. The beauty of the park and the surrounding hills, combined with the clear crisp frosty air, made the walk delightful, and the hours passed all too rapidly; but it was marvellous how intimate the three young people had become in that space of time. They seemed to have known each other for years. Silvia's pale cheeks had got a rose tint and her grey eyes looked brighter and darker than usual, so that she resembled more than ever her cousin Alexander. She talked more than usual, too, the conversation being carried on in English to please Alexander, who liked to hear her pretty, child-like foreign accent. And while she was seeking the proper phraseology to express her thought he always supplied the exact words she wanted, so complete was his sympathy and understanding of her mind and character. Whence came this sympathy he accounted for by the tie of blood, family likenesses being capricious and often cropping up in distant relatives; and to the underlying similarity of tastes was added the charm of novelty, each belonging to a different nation. Amedeo, as was inevitable under the circumstances, often found himself left out of the conversation. But he was one of those rare unselfish men who was always more occupied with the happiness and pleasure of others than his own, and he was content to listen, amused and pleased to see his sister in such good spirits.

A delicious little dinner was awaiting the friends at the hotel, and they had a merry Christmas indeed; not one discordant note marred the joy of that happy day.

"Here's to our merry meeting this day twelve months," said the



host, filling the ladies' glasses. "May it be under the old family roof-tree of our common ancestry—I don't mean monkeys, you know, by common ancestors—I mean Bodkins, of course, who were very ancient, but don't date quite so far back. What pleasure it will give me to greet you there I can hardly express, but you will understand and believe me, I am sure."

And with this they broke up and shook hands.

"I wish you a happy new year, cousin Silvia, and many of them," said Alexander, as they stood at the foot of the stairs, ready for departure, after he had paid his compliments to the mother.

"I wish you the same with all my heart," she replied, with her pretty Italian effusiveness, which had in it, however, a note of deep sincerity. "You deserve it."

"Ah, to be sure, the fairy godfather ought to have his share of the sweets he is dispensing with such a liberal hand. At least he ought to live in the affectionate remembrance of his god-children—*non è vero?*"

"Surely!"

"That is reward enough for the pleasure of being the bearer of good tidings," said Alexander, suddenly laying by his gay smile and looking serious.

"Will you remember me when I am gone, apart from the good news?"

"Will *you* remember us when you return to your gay fashionable world?" asked Silvia.

"Aye; that I will for ever."

He darted a look down upon her upturned face which pierced her and at the same moment revealed his own soul to her. Her head grew giddy with the sudden revelation; she could not speak or move. He took her hand and wished her the compliments of the season in the ordinary tones of society, while he led her to the carriage where her mother was already placed. But in the thrilling pressure of his hand she felt a great wave of emotion was passing over his soul, and it communicated itself to hers. She sank back in the corner of the carriage and heard nothing more that passed. The one thought which absorbed her was, he was going away! If the imperious duties of his position obliged him to depart like the fairy prince he described himself, why did he not spare her that look which revealed his momentous secret?

Arrived at the door of their modest dwelling, Amedeo was handing his mother out of the carriage and remarking what a happy day it had been—not all due to the fortune—for much they owed to their charming cousin.

"How shall we live without him when he is gone?" he said.

Just then someone slapped him on the shoulder and exclaimed—"Here I am, old fellow. You cannot live without me, and I cannot live without you—at least one of you." It was the fairy prince who

had just leaped off the box. He leaned into the carriage where Silvia still sat almost dazed, and taking her hand he pressed it to his bosom and whispered, "To part with you would be parting with my own soul, or tearing it asunder."

'A twofold existence,  
I am where thou art,'"

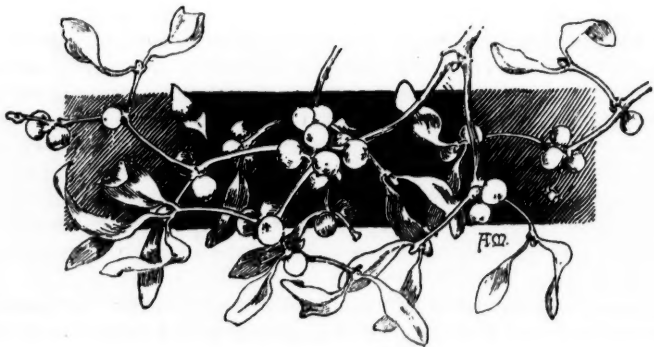
He then turned to the old lady and said, "Signora, you told me this evening that you would never refuse me any favour I could ask. I am now a suppliant for the greatest it is in your power to bestow. I ask the hand of your daughter. I see I have taken you by surprise, but when I had decided I could not rest to-night till I had my answer. It is better to know our fate at once. Speak a word for me, Amedeo."

"I think Silvia should speak for herself," said the brother.

"She has spoken—with her eyes," returned the lover. "There is nothing for you and your mother to do but to give us your blessing. It is all right, dear Signora, is it not? You will rest better to-night if you add this crowning happiness to our happy day and say *yes*?"

The old lady, thus importuned on her door-step on a cold night, did not withhold her consent long, and after a general shaking of hands the eccentric suitor leaped into the carriage and drove off, saying as he waved his adieux:

"Oh, that blessed Bodkin letter!"





“RING OUT THE OLD—RING IN THE NEW.”

So still, so still, the hush so deep,  
That falls upon the charmed land,  
While we our wistful vigil keep  
Proclaims the Holy-tide at hand.

Proclaims at hand the birth of Christ—  
Sweet vagrant notes of mellow bells,  
From spires wrapped soft in rimy mist,  
Float o'er the far white hills and dells.

Then warm as sunshine, light as snow,  
Falls on our hearts the sense of rest,  
The sense of peace—by which we know  
Christ is *Himself* our Christmas guest.

HELEN MARION BURNSIDE.

## THE NEW BOY AT STANHOPE'S.

THE sleepy sunshiny old town of St. Baldwin's prides itself with justice, so its inhabitants will tell you, on three noteworthy possessions—its antiquities, its Grammar School and its good society, and these three are inseparably connected—or were, till the coming of Mrs. Paul Stanhope.

Society confines itself to the Minster Close and its neighbourhood; clinging as faithfully to the quaint, tall ivy-covered houses as the rooks to their nests in the elm trees that surround their green stretches of velvet lawn; and the rooks only know what would happen to an outsider who dared to intrude on the sacred precincts. The biggest and best houses belong to the Staff of the Grammar School, the rest are tenanted by the resident clergy, retired officers of both the services, a few Indian civilians and sundry widowed and spinster offshoots of the county families. The headmaster is a dignified, handsome personage, a scholar and preacher of note, who is known to have refused a Colonial bishopric, and is reported to be sure of the next deanery. His wife, Lady Cecilia, is great at bazaars and similar church functions, but chary of her presence at minor entertainments. The second in command is like unto his chief, with a high-nosed, haughty wife from Girton, who is believed to have edited a Greek play. The next is mild, musical and well connected, with a wife to correspond; and the fourth is an elderly, quiet, high-bred looking man, chiefly remarkable as a good master, a bad tennis-player and the husband of Mrs. Paul Stanhope.

How he ever came to marry her no one in St. Baldwin's can imagine; and the most curious thing about it is that they are both still in love with one another!

She is a showy little woman, with a brilliant taste in dress, no culture to speak of, and a devouring social ambition; worst of all—fabulously, flagrantly, *indecently* rich. She is understood to be the only child and heiress of an eminent oil and colour merchant in a northern manufacturing town, and a stout, red-faced old gentleman who appeared in St. Baldwin's one day criticising the antiquities in broadest Lancashire, and stigmatising the Grammar School residences as "mere rat-holes" was supposed to be the papa in question.

His visit was followed by the erection of a palatial residence, all freestone and plate-glass, for the young couple in Forest Road—a region quite beyond the pale, where the aspiring tradesman pitches his suburban villa—and a London upholsterer was subsequently turned loose in it with instructions to "mak summut as ud oppen t' foalks eyes," and that upholsterer had obeyed.

Stanhope had stood firm on the point of not giving up his boarders on his marriage. He really liked his boys, and perhaps reflected that the boom in mineral oil might not last for ever, and that his father-in-law, though mildly generous to his daughter, strewing her wedded path with costly gifts and cheques in four figures, had made but a limited settlement on her, with some vague notion of ensuring her good behaviour.

Thus it chanced that one morning in the Michaelmas term Mr. Stanhope, after reading and re-reading a letter, with a doubtful look in his handsome brown eyes, handed it across the breakfast-table to his wife, remarking :

"Another boy. I don't think we can take him."

Mrs. Stanhope took but a languid interest in the boarders, who were relegated to a separate building under the care of an experienced matron. She stretched out a pretty white hand, looking admiringly at the twinkle of the diamonds on her plump fingers, then more admiringly at her husband's face half-eclipsed by his coffee-cup, lastly at the sheet of paper, indifferently at first, then with sudden interest. It was thick and creamy and decorated with a coronet and address.

"Sherringham Abbey! Can it be from the Earl?"

"No, only from some guest of his, I suppose."

"But it's signed 'Sherringham.' No, I see that is only the Christian name. 'Sherringham Winston.' Well 'Winston' is one of the Earl's family names. It *must* be a relation." The peerage was the one subject on which Mrs. Paul Stanhope could have passed an examination with credit. She read—

"DEAR SIR,—I have sent in the name of my son John Marmaduke Valance Sherringham Winston—"

("The Earl's name is John, and the Countess was one of the ladies Valance, perhaps she's his god-mother.")

"—to the headmaster for admission to the Grammar School at the half-term. I have also requested that he may become an inmate of your house, and I now write to explain to you in confidence my reasons for wishing you to undertake this charge. By an unforeseen series of circumstances my son is now brought into the position of next heir to a large landed estate and, in all human probability, to a title—"

("It can't be Sherringham. The Earl has ten children.")

"—I now recognise with deep regret the selfishness of the affection which prompted me to keep the child with me in my wanderings from one foreign capital to another—"

("I suppose he's in the Diplomatic service.")

"—instead of giving him the education of an English gentleman. My kind kinsman recommends St. Baldwin's strongly—"

("I wonder why? Perhaps he knows Lady Cecilia or some of the governors.")

"—and having had the pleasure of meeting you and your charming wife last summer, assures me that you are eminently qualified to give my poor boy the tone of good society in which, owing to his wandering life, he might be found deficient."

"Why! Who! Where? It *must* have been that delightful old gentleman at the table-d'hôte at Southsea, who hadn't put his name down in the visitor's book. I *told* you he was somebody."

"My dear, I never denied it," said Mr. Stanhope, placidly handing his cup for more coffee. "But I don't particularly want the boy. An unlicked cub of fifteen sent here to learn manners and his alphabet, and to teach the others all manner of foreign tricks."

"But Paul—! We *must* have him here. Next heir to a title—I wish I knew what it is—I suppose that doesn't always make them honourables, does it? What a pity! It would give quite a tone to the school. Paul, we *must* have him! If we are full, so much the better. It will be a reason for having him here in the house with us. I shall give him the blue bedroom."

"Put a schoolboy in amongst all that lace and satin flouncing and frilling! You must do as you like, dear, but if he keeps rabbits in the wardrobe and makes booby-traps with your Limoges crockery don't blame me."

"Then he may come? Paul, you're a darling!"

"If the headmaster has consented, I don't see how I can prevent it; as long as the school fees are paid in advance and he has nothing catching about him. Time for prayers! I must be off!" and with a hasty kiss Mr. Stanhope shook himself into his gown, snatched up his cap and departed.

Not only Mrs. Stanhope's smart victoria but Mrs. Paul Stanhope herself was in waiting to receive the new boy on the appointed day. A pile of neat luggage stood on the platform, and beside it a slight dark youth in a well-cut tweed suit and straw hat. He followed the servant to the carriage where Mrs. Stanhope was prepared to greet him with motherly effusion, but, though he smiled a charming smile and raised his hat gracefully as he approached, she felt, she didn't know why, a sort of check to her amiable impulse. She was prepared for shyness, for, possibly, a dash of aristocratic hauteur, but not for the first look of those bold black eyes that read her through and through and over and over, and made her feel as if all the sins she had ever committed as well as the incipient crack in the thumb of her glove, and the tiny touch of pearl powder on the left side of her nose, flashed into view in that one glance. It passed in an instant (and nothing ever disconcerted Mrs. Paul Stanhope much longer), so before they reached home she and the new-comer were on excellent terms.

"I asked him about the title," she said during a confidential chat over the study fire that night.



"You did! What did he say?"

"Oh, he coloured up and said, 'No such thing;' and then, 'I wish you'd never heard of it.' I heard him mutter, 'dev'lish bad taste'—I suppose he meant his father; and then he begged I wouldn't talk about it. The property is in Staffordshire. Then I asked him how old he was."

"And what did he tell you? Fifteen?"

"No, he laughed and said it was his dear old pater's weakness to make him out still an infant. He was really not certain himself. He had never kept his birthdays."

"He has been scandalously neglected all round. He knows nothing whatever of Latin or mathematics, and not much more of English. I was surprised to find he could read and write as well as he does."

"But living abroad."

"Oh, I know. But Brown says his French isn't up to much either. Low-class accent and idiom—certainly not the language of diplomacy."

"Mr. Brown's own French may be good enough to teach the Army Class, but I doubt whether it is up to date colloquially."

"Well, well. We shall see what extra lessons with Byles will do for him"—Mr. Byles was the head of the preparatory school—"and meanwhile take as much interest in him as you like, my dear, only remember—he's no chicken. He's been shaving these two years at least, or I'm much mistaken."

The new boy's *débüt* in the playing-fields had at first been hardly more successful. His mind was a blank as to football and fives, and his rowing lacked form, but he was good-tempered and ready to learn, explaining that his time had been spent amongst people whose severest physical exercise was cigarette-making. However, when Hewlett, an ill-conditioned young ruffian in the fifth form, ventured to indulge in some very uncomplimentary criticisms on Winston's appearance, the promptitude with which he was invited to take a licking was only equalled by the neatness and despatch with which that licking was administered that same evening, after tea, behind the pavilion before a critical and delighted circle of spectators.

But it was in Mrs. Stanhope's drawing-room that Winston's merits found their full appreciation. He spent every spare moment with her, clipped her poodle for her in the very latest French style and fitted him with silver bangles, fetched and carried like a poodle himself; delighted her with choice scraps of gossip from his father's letters concerning the great folk with whom he was staying, and handed tea and cake on her "at home" day, when he amused old Lady Rumbold to such an extent that he received an invitation to "Naoshera Villa," an honour never before conferred on mortal schoolboy.

St. Baldwin's might disapprove of seeing the handsome, well-dressed youngster every afternoon in the victoria beside Mrs. Stanhope, or curled up, like the tame cat he was, on her drawing-room hearth-rug,

but society nevertheless studied its peerage, and before half the first week was out had settled that there was either galloping consumption in the Sherringham family, or something unsound in the Earl's marriage. Lady Cecilia might have spoken with authority on the subject, but Lady Cecilia never went to afternoon teas, and the chit-chat of St Baldwin's only floated up to her by slow degrees.

"The Rector has sent to say he cannot come on Wednesday, after all!" Mrs. Stanhope exclaimed disgustedly. "And I don't know another odd man to ask. I shall make Marmaduke come in; he shall take in Miss Norris." Now Miss Norris was an Indian judge's only daughter. Mr. Stanhope demurred. His wife's wish was still law to him, but he felt uneasily that on points of school etiquette her instinct was not to be depended on, and this dinner-party was to be a very special one indeed.

A certain scientific peer was now staying with one of the governors of the Grammar School. Lady Cecilia had issued invitations to an "at home" in his honour; but Mrs. Paul Stanhope had "gone one better" and secured him for a dinner the day before; the second motive of the entertainment being the display of the eminent oil merchant's latest gift, a gorgeous dessert-service in gold plate, whereof the fame had spread abroad. Society in St. Baldwin's did not give dinner-parties and possessed no gold candlesticks or fruit-baskets, so it sneered but accepted.

A flutter of feverish excitement pervaded the Stanhope household on the important day. A French artist from London, with his aides and materials, took possession of the kitchen. The butler requisitioned all the other servants to assist in putting his plate and glass into order. Mrs. Stanhope was agitated about her dress—a trousseau marvel which had almost run to seed for want of an opportunity to wear it, and required revision and alteration at the last minute. She leaves it on record that she could never have lived through the stress and strain of it all but for "that dear boy Duke."

Luckily it was St. Baldwin's day and a school holiday. The other boys went off to a match in the playing-fields, but he remained faithful to his liege lady, helped to arrange flowers, ran to the town with forgotten orders, filled in menu and guest cards neatly, told her exactly how far back on her head she ought to wear her diamond aigrette, and was at last found with a glass-cloth girded on by way of apron, polishing an entrée dish and entertaining the party in the pantry with an account of how he had once helped his friend the host of the *Golden Stag* somewhere in the Tyrol by acting as waiter one day when a great personage arrived unexpectedly, and the staff of the hotel had been disbanded for the season.

He assisted Mrs. Fanshaw to put the final touches to the completed glory of the table, and then ran off to get through his school preparation in time to dress.

Mrs. Stanhope went to summon her husband to admire the result of her labours. He was ushering a little man out of his study as she crossed the hall ; a sharp dark little man in a very bad temper.

"Well, sir, I ask you for the last time to think better of it," he was saying.

"And I must answer for the last time, 'No,'" replied Mr. Stanhope in his gentle obstinate voice.

"Very well, sir ; I shall take my own measures, and if anything goes wrong the responsibility rests with you."

"I am prepared to accept it. Good afternoon."

"Who's that, Paul ? An aggrieved parent ?" Mrs. Stanhope asked, as the street-door closed.

"A very much aggrieved man. Did your orchids come in time ?"

Mr. Stanhope's face was grave as he gazed on the brilliant show of plate and crystal, fruit and flowers—a study in gold and white. His wife was dimly beginning to understand that he thought her magnificence out-of-place. "Father sent me a cheque, you know, and told me to do it in style."

"All right, my dear," he replied as usual. "The money is yours to do what you please with."

"But I don't please unless you please too," she answered, half sympathetic, half resentful. Then they parted and he took his way thoughtfully to Winston's room.

It was not the blue bedroom after all. Duke had taken alarm at its gorgeousness and begged for another, a little bit of a place over the pantry, built for the butler, but indignantly declined by him as "inconvenient and having a north aspect." Here Mr. Stanhope found his pupil, looking over a Latin grammar in his shirt-sleeves.

"I want your father's present address, Winston," he said.

"I can't say where he is exactly to-day, sir. He is always visiting about. A letter to his club will always reach him. Anything wrong, sir ?"

"N-no." Mr. Stanhope seemed to have a difficulty in expressing himself. "Mrs. Stanhope has asked you to dine with us to-night——"

"But I begged off, sir," eagerly interrupted Winston. "You see I never went out with my father anywhere, and"—with a frank laugh—"I'm shy. I don't know English ways and might be discrediting myself and you too. That's the truth. But you don't mind me coming in afterwards, do you ?"

"N-no," said Mr. Stanhope again. "How about your work ?"

"Got it all done but one little bit that I can't make sense of."

"Let me help you." The two sat down side by side. Mr. Stanhope had nothing to do with the boy in school, but gave him a little help at odd times, at first on account of his wife's interest in the lad, later, because of his own.

"You are getting on fast, Winston. You will soon catch up other

boys of your age if you persevere. With your ability the highest prizes of knowledge are open to you."

"I might be a Prime Minister, or even a headmaster," Winston answered, not disrespectfully, but with a certain dreary mockery which Mr. Stanhope elected not to notice, but hurried off to dress.

"Now, what's wrong?" asked Winston of himself as he dropped on his knees beside the trunk in which he had been groping when the master entered. "I shouldn't wonder now if that awful dad of mine hadn't paid the fees. It would be just like him," and he exploded with silent laughter. His thoughts had taken another direction when he emerged from the trunk. "So I might be a blooming sixth-form boy, and go to college. Oh my!" Then he laid out his dress-suit neatly, and proceeded to adorn himself.

Mrs. Stanhope's lucky star shone on that evening. The dress fitted to perfection, the table was a vision of beauty, with its lovely white blossoms in their costly vases and its gold-broidered naperies. The cook surpassed himself; the noble lord showed unbounded appreciation of the fare spread before him, and Mrs. Stanhope's diamonds put out Lady Cecilia's as an arc-lamp a night-light. The little lady sat through the dinner in a quiver of delight and exultation, enjoying herself thoroughly.

Even the bad half-hour in the drawing-room afterwards had its mitigations. Lady Cecilia yawned frankly when addressed, and calmly composed herself to sleep behind her fan. The county ladies prosed to one another about their relations, their G.F.S. work in their villages, and their children's ailments, and, except once to ask for a subscription, seemed to forget the hostess's existence. The masters' wives talked school "shop," in which she had no part, but she had not time to realise the full dreariness of it all before the door opened to admit Duke, and, shyly treading on his heels, the head of the school. A sixth-form boy, big, bronzed, and bashful, who had won an Oxford scholarship and also a match for his county against the M.C.C., but who nevertheless bore himself meekly, not to say sheepishly, with a painful sense of his coat being too tight in the arm-holes and his tie a wisp. Now Duke's coat was built by an artist, and his tie a miracle, diamond studs glittered in his shirt, and he came into the room as if he liked it. The boys slipped modestly into the background near their hostess and the pretty, Miss Norris, whom Duke was not allowed to take in to dinner, and in five minutes the fun in that corner became so fast and furious that the county ladies stopped their mild gossip to listen, and the youngest and giddiest of the masters' wives came and joined in. Then such of the gentlemen as had not deserted to the billiard-room entered, and by that time Duke was at the piano and the first few bars of a popular operetta rippled from under his finger-tips. He played a little, sang a song, and then another, giving imitations of the actors; then dropped into a popular melody with a chorus in which everybody felt impelled

to join. Even Lady Cecilia laughed under protest and made a mental memo. to have him in at her "at home."

It was just then that Mr. Stanhope, entering from the billiard-room, stepped three paces into the room softly, and laid his hand on the arm of the head of the school. Then both slipped away unnoticed.

They crossed the hall to the dining-room, where the butler was still moving about, extinguishing candles and putting away decanters.

"I should like to show you one piece of that service, Hardman. It's as fine as anything since Benvenuto Cellini. Have you put it all away, Colburn?"

"Why, no, sir." Colburn's tone was slightly offended. "Not without having cleaned it, after all them messy flowers and candles. I shall just leave it here till to-morrow. There isn't time to do justice to it to-night, and I believe my supper is ready, sir," and with that Colburn disappeared to the distant servants' hall.

When he had gone Mr. Stanhope extinguished the last candle and lifted the heavy velvet window curtain. The moon, which had been full on the house, was dropping behind a clump of firs. The stable-clock struck the half-hour after ten.

"I have received a warning this afternoon that an attempt will be made on the house to-night," he said, peering out. "A man came down from Scotland Yard about it. He wants to catch the burglars in the act."

"Yes, sir," said Hardman delightedly; "can't I help?"

"He suspects a confederate indoors. I do not, and I have refused to allow him or any of his men to conceal themselves on the premises. I thought I'd ask you to keep guard here till I got rid of our guests."

Hardman grinned joyfully. "Have you got a revolver, sir?"

"No. No noise. You must trust to your fists. Now let's look at the windows."

The great oriel at the end of the room which had been open during dinner was securely fastened, the last act of the conscientious Colburn before departing, and the electric alarm attached. Mr. Stanhope thought for a moment, and then disconnected the alarm and unbolted the window. Hardman, in high glee, established himself behind the folds of the curtain.

He would have been rather astonished if he had seen his master's next proceeding, which was to unlock with a key, fastened to his watch chain, a door in the passage leading to the back of the house and set it open, and then, taking up a wax taper, stand patiently under the gas-lamp in the hall waiting events. Through the drawing-room door came the sound of Duke's merry music for a few minutes, and then a buzz of talk and laughter. Then a pause, and then, in solemn silence, the first bars of Mozart's exasperating *Fantasia* in C minor interpreted by the musical master's wife. At the end of the first movement the door opened softly and Duke slipped out.

He gave a nervous jump when he saw the master stretching to the gas trying ineffectually to light his taper.

"Hillo, Winston. Just come here and light this for me. Those servants have gone off to supper and Colburn hasn't put out the liqueur stand. Just light the gas in the plate-closet, please."

Winston carried his taper to the plate-closet and lighted up a small gas-jet in the wall. As he did so the door shut gently on him and he heard the key click twice in the lock. He gave a start that turned the gas out and sprang madly at the door. It was fast. A stout iron-lined door with no keyhole on the inside. A sharp spasm of fear, rage, astonishment, clutched at his heart, and he drew his breath in an agony of actual physical pain for an instant. Then that passed, and he stood and swore, noiselessly but vigorously, for a space. Lastly he groped till he found the corner of a plate-chest to sit down upon and burst out laughing.

"Sold, by jingo! The old fox! Now *what* is he going to do with me?"

He had time to consider the question. Eleven chimed out from a clock somewhere. The Fantasia after raising many false hopes came really and truly to its end at last, and the guests in the drawing-room began to disperse—they are early people at St. Baldwin's. Winston could hear the carriages rolling up and the opening and shutting of the front-door. Then half-past eleven sounded, and he swore afresh and stamped with excitement. More voices and footsteps in the hall; this was the later party from the billiard-room. Then the last bang of the front-door and Colburn passing yawningly back to his unfinished supper. Then a confused noise of shouts and whistles that made him run wildly to the door and glue his ear to it in a frantic effort to catch the import, grinding his teeth in impotent wrath. If he could but have seen through the door and two brick walls he might have made out Mr. Stanhope, poker in hand, on guard at the open window of the dark deserted dining-room; a confused cluster of figures on the lawn outside, and in the far moonlit distance a black speck speeding across the playing-fields with another black speck drawing surely and steadily nearer and nearer as the youth and superior training of the head of the school began to tell; a third black figure with a helmet and truncheon was plodding along far behind. Then the cluster on the lawn became definite, and arranged itself into a group of three policemen with a couple of unattractive-looking fellows handcuffed in their midst, and a fourth man coming forward jumped nimbly through the window and touched his hat to Mr. Stanhope.

"A very clever capture, Mr. Inspector," said the master politely.

The officer smiled sourly. "Very well as far as it goes; we've been wanting all those fellows for the Litton Park business, but there's some dashed hanky-panky about this which I can't understand. That young gentleman of yours wasn't exactly the person I expected to see."



"I don't understand. Why?"

"Well, I'm not often mistaken, and I could have sworn that the Count was at the bottom of this job. He's a new pal they picked up in Paris—dark, smart, little beggar, looks a toff, speaks the languages and plays the piano. Don't know him myself, but someone who does saw him in the High Street here about a week ago. He hasn't been round tuning your piano or photographing your house and stables, has he? I shouldn't have been surprised to see him dining here, but I took a look through the window when I posted my men and didn't see anyone like him."

"You can look in at the servants if you choose. All the men are still on the premises. In fact you may search the house if you can do so without alarming my wife."

"Thank you, sir. I'll just go quietly round for my own satisfaction."

Winston, sitting in the dark on his plate-chest heard their steps pause at his door, and with set teeth and caught breath groped in the dark for something to strike with.

"This is the plate-closet, but the key never leaves my possession," Mr. Stanhope's voice said, and they passed by.

Midnight passed and one o'clock struck before that door opened and the master, his bedroom candle in his hand, looked in.

"Haden't you better come to bed, Winston. It is very late," he said in his usual calm emotionless way. "Mrs. Stanhope had hysterics when she heard of the attempted burglary. She has only just got to sleep, so make no noise."

His pupil went before him upstairs to his room. The Latin grammar still lay open on the toilette table amongst the ivory-backed hair-brushes and silver-mounted pots and bottles, and the pupil flung himself sullenly down in the chair beside it and looked up defiantly questioning. Mr. Stanhope took the other chair as if he were about to resume the lesson.

"Kindly give me an outline of the plans with which I interfered this evening?" he said in his usual school voice.

Winston, for all reply, stretched out a long arm to his trunk and tipped back the lid. Two large thick-lined sacks lay within.

"I should have filled those as full as they would hold and dropped them out of the window. Two men—whose names I reserve—were in waiting outside to receive them. They would have been carried to the fence and lifted over. A cab was in waiting on the other side. No one would remark a stray cab waiting outside your house to-night, you know. It would have been driven to the station. Being market-day here the place would be crowded with all sorts of people carrying all sorts of baggage. In the meantime I should have returned to the drawing-room with the piece of music Miss Norris asked me to lend her—may I send it to her to-morrow, please?—and another of our party would have completed the business by returning to cut out a square of glass, mark the flower-beds with foot-prints, place the

gardener's ladder against the fruit-garden wall and furnish as many other traces as time allowed."

"Good. And you?"

"An urgent telegram from my father will arrive to-morrow after prayers. He is appointed Assistant-supernumerary-Secretary of Legation at Venezuela, and wishes to see me before he goes."

"He does well to telegraph. Otherwise his handwriting and yours are so much alike as to arouse suspicion."

"Well, the game's up!" said Duke pulling himself together. "Do you mind telling me one thing? Why didn't you give me up?"

Mr. Stanhope looked as pleased as when a boy asked him an intelligent question in class.

"I had three reasons. First, the scandal. Secondly, Mrs. Stanhope would have wished me to save you. Thirdly, I thought I could find a better use to put you to. I like you, you know."

"The deuce you do? Why?"

"You work well. I could make you a credit to St. Baldwin's in a year or two; and you're a pleasant gentlemanly little fellow, plucky and good-tempered. I wish we could keep you."

"Won't do. A nice little wolf I feel amongst all these precious lambkins. I should show my teeth presently and end by worrying if I were kept in the fold. It's odd to me that I haven't broken out before this. I find myself wondering if I had the chances these young beggars have—my father was a scholar and a gentleman, that's why I take to books I suppose—but what's the use of talking—I know I couldn't stand the life. You'd end by having to hunt me down and shoot me—the end of all vermin," and the poor wolf showed his white teeth in a snarl while his eyes looked wistful.

"I presume that you consider your present profession the one for which you are best fitted?" Mr. Stanhope put the case delicately.

"I'd like to be a soldier best of all. I've tried to enlist over and over again, but I'm too small. I thought when I was in Paris of trying to get into a Zouave regiment, but I don't know that I could, and it would be hideously lonesome amongst foreigners."

"A friend of mine is going out to organise a body of mounted gendarmerie to put down brigandage in Montenegro. He was wishing for an English volunteer or two."

"Where's the place? How do you get there? I can ride and shoot and learn the language of any country you put me in in a couple of days. Do you really mean I may go?"

"Can you do more than ride and shoot? Can you obey orders? Live a rough life with scanty rations and irregular pay? Give up the pleasures of a town life for hard work in a strange country with the chance of being shot in a scrimmage."

Duke's eyes were flashing brighter and brighter. "Just try me?" he almost gasped.

"I will. That is if you carry out my directions implicitly. We must

let that telegram come, I suppose? Well, if the headmaster consents to your leaving I will see you up to town myself, take you to Captain Markham and tell him the whole story. If he consents to take you with him I will see to your outfit and travelling expenses. You will give me your word of honour to have no further communication with your late companions, nor under any pretext to approach Mrs. Stanhope except to take leave of her. She will not know that it is a final one."

"I promise. But you're sure you mean it? You'll start me fair, help me off, and never let on to anybody what has become of me? Well, I *am* blest!" and the wolf choked as if someone had given him too big a bone to swallow.

For months after Mrs. Stanhope mourned over the loss of her dear boy Marmaduke, and looked out for tidings which came not; after that new interests in her life wiped out the recollection. The eminent oil merchant has taken unto himself a new wife, an ex-maid-of-honour and the daughter of an Irish peer, but has settled a handsome income on Mrs. Stanhope by way of compensation. The gold service has been disposed of by private contract to the infinite relief of its owners. Mr. Stanhope still keeps on the boarders, but the story of his most interesting pupil is to this day a secret in St. Baldwin's.

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## H O P E.

FROM VICTOR HUGO.

SWEET hope, my child, is nothing but a reed:

God holds in hand our days, beloved one.

He winds them on the wheel that turns with speed.

The thread breaks, and our life-long toil is done.

In every cradle decked with rosy wreath

Lurk germs of death.

Once, long, long years ago, futurity

Before my eyes with purest radiance glowed,

The stars with glory filled the midnight sky,

The sea with halcyon breezes calmly flowed;

But all these visions of an earlier day

Have passed away.

If, near thee, one should turn away to weep,

Ask not the reason of those silent tears;

For they are sweet, and lull men's grief to sleep—

Soft solace in our many cares and fears.

And every teardrop, child, like summer rain

Blots out a stain!

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## SISTER CLARE.

BY GEORGE FOSBERY.

## I.

IT was quite evident that a practitioner, like Dr. Mallory, who seemed to allow himself no higher ambition than to practice among the poorest of the poor, who sacrificed rest and appetite, and health in a never-ending struggle to alleviate the sufferings of the outcast population; it was evident, I say, that such a man as this would never reach the pinnacle of fame attained by those whose principal employment was to administer to the necessities of aristocratic hypochondriacs at two guineas per consultation.

Dr. Mallory was returning to his lodgings one night jaded and hungry, hoping to snatch a few hours' sleep after a well-earned supper when a begrimed urchin of a boy overtook him and caught him by the sleeve. He stopped at once. The boy inquired if he were not "the doctor."

"Yes, I am a doctor."

"If you please, sir, nurse says will you come at once?"

"Certainly." The boy led the way, and Dr. Mallory followed close behind.

"Where do you live?"

"Third pair back, sir. Angel Court, sir. Last house on the right, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Jack. Mother's dying. At least, nurse says she's dying."

"Who is nurse?"

"Sister Clare."

Dr. Mallory's face—a sad face for so young a man—lighted up at the mention of the name. He knew Sister Clare as one, like himself, battling with disease day and night in the attempt to lower, even infinitesimally, the level of the sea of misery around them. She belonged to no recognised sisterhood, and worked in connection with none of the recognised charitable organisations. A something of mystery attached itself to her. No one—least of all, Ernest Mallory—knew whence she came. A year had gone by since the doctor had first become aware of the existence of this rival in his patients' affections. Since then, from time to time, he had met her again under circumstances more or less like the present; and on each occasion had been more strongly attracted by her individuality.

"How," he would ask himself, "does this beautiful girl come to be occupied as she is, in such horrible surroundings? Beautiful she certainly is, and an angel in good works.

Jack led the way to the "third floor back." The doctor entered the room where the boy's mother lay—an apartment of which the squalor was partially betrayed by the dim light of a smoking tallow candle stuck in a bottle for candlestick.

Sister Clare was seated on a cane-chair, of which little more than the framework survived. She rose and met the doctor with a statement of the symptoms in the case of the sick woman stretched upon a heap of rags on the floor.

"She is too weak to be moved to-night to a hospital," she added, "even if they would take her in."

Dr. Mallory made his examination; and taking Sister Clare aside, stated his fear that the wretched patient was dying of sheer starvation. She might recover, he said, if Sister Clare continued to feed her carefully with the jelly which that thoughtful nurse had brought and had already begun to administer. He would come again the first thing in the morning.

Sister Clare offered to remain with the patient so long as was necessary. Jack was told off to accompany the doctor in order to bring back wine for his mother.

Sister Clare followed Dr. Mallory to the door and shook his hand.

"You are not looking well," she said, scanning his face. "Could you be tempted to take a short holiday?"

"I cannot leave these poor sick souls."

"True, they cannot afford to lose you. That is my reason for proposing that you should take a rest."

"It is so easy to fear for one's own health," he said.

"Will you take my advice, Dr. Mallory?" and her smile persuaded him.

"Where am I to go, and for how long? Do not be too exacting."

She paused for a moment, as if wondering how he would take her prescription.

"They are starting a hospital in our village. Will you come down to stay for two or three days, and give us a hint or two? My father and mother will be glad to receive you without ceremony, and you will do just as you please at Drythorpe."

"And you?"

"I am going there to-morrow, after providing for this poor woman's necessities. My mother will write to you. Will you come?"

"Thank you," he replied. "I will come." It was impossible to refuse her.

## II.

A COUPLE of days passed. Dr. Mallory was obliged to admit to himself that Sister Clare's warning had been given not a moment too soon. He went about as usual amongst his patients; but for the first time in their experience he failed to inspire them with hope of recovery. The accumulation of misery on every side depressed

him with a weight which hitherto he had always succeeded in throwing off.

On the third morning Dr. Mallory opened a letter which he found upon his plate at the breakfast table. It was written on an ordinary sheet of white paper, enclosed in an ordinary square envelope.

“DRYTHORPE, HANTS. *Thursday.*”

“DEAR DR. MALLORY,—My daughter Clare tells me you have generously promised to help us with advice about our village hospital. Can you come down on Saturday, and stay with us for three or four days? It will be a great pleasure to us to see you.

“Believe me, yours sincerely,

“MARGARET EASTON.”

The warm welcome which this letter seemed to promise him opened Ernest Mallory's heart.

“The hospitality of these good people will do a poor jaded man like myself more good than that of all the royalties in Christendom.”

The evil spirit of dejection had fled! He scarcely realised that Sister Clare was the fairy who had deliberately planned to dissipate his gloom.

Needless to say, Mallory accepted the invitation. He promised to arrive at Drythorpe by the train reaching that station at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. He arranged with another medical man that his patients should not be neglected, and determined to leave town with a clear conscience.

The Saturday afternoon train was crowded with passengers bound for the country. Their noisiness, their high spirits, their struggles with circumstances, their general disposition to make the best of a bad world, brought about a healthier and happier frame of mind in the man who had for so long doomed himself to keep vigil over the sick and dying.

The train drew up at Drythorpe. Dr. Mallory alighted, and asked the station-master “Where some people of the name of Easton lived.”

“Going to Lord Easton's, sir?”

“Lord Easton!” repeated the visitor.

“I think this is the gentleman,” said the station-master, addressing a footman in livery. Then turning to Dr. Mallory, he added, “His lordship's carriage has come for you, sir.”

The doctor, too surprised to resist, was thus borne off to Lord Easton's family seat at Drythorpe.



## III.

AT Drythorpe—the mansion which gave the village its name—Dr. Mallory was received with a welcome which would have satisfied many a much greater man than he was in the world's estimation.

Lord and Lady Easton were kindness itself, as the phrase runs. The Honourable Clare Easton had doffed the comparatively gloomy uniform of the nurse, and appeared before him for the first time in the costume appropriate to country life.

He was puzzled to find that her manner also was changed. Was it for the worse? He could not yet answer this question. As a fact, he had never before met her in circumstances corresponding to those in which she had been born and bred. Was it fair to find fault with her for yielding to the reaction which came with her absence from the common scenes of suffering? Of course not. It was only natural that when the strain of her duties was removed she should fly back to the easy, contented, and more cheerful ways of life in keeping with her social station. And yet the change came upon him as a shock—that anyone should desert the path of heroism in order to saunter down the broad road of comfort and forgetfulness.

On the other hand, in her new position she appeared to him in a totally different light. Divested of the outward and visible emblems of her profession (namely, the nurse's bonnet and cloak), which undoubtedly enveloped her with an air of business rather than pleasure, she now shone as the type of English beauty at its best—save that her cheeks had lost a little of the bloom that speaks of perfect health.

This view of her personality tended to arouse once more a feeling of admiration which Dr. Mallory had thrust back, again and again, in his former relations with her among the London poor. It was hard formerly to admit that Sister Clare could be nothing to him, except a colleague and acquaintance; and he could not reconcile himself to the thought that Miss Easton should be even less.

Would anyone for a moment entertain a proposal that the Peer's daughter should be given in marriage to the pauper's physician? Had not the pauper's physician enough pride to put his foot down, and to say to himself that he would never make that proposal, that he would never allow it to be thought, much less bruited about, that he loved Miss Easton for her wealth and station?

"Alas!" he mused, "if she had only been what I expected her to be—a village maiden, a poor man's child, a humble diamond!"

The party at dinner numbered six. When Dr. Mallory entered the drawing-room two strangers had arrived; Mrs. Dunthorne and her son, the Reverend Horace Dunthorne, the curate at Drythorpe.

Dr. Mallory noticed instantly that the curate claimed to be very intimate with Miss Easton. The two were sitting slightly apart from

the others in the room, and conversing with a rapidity and familiarity which could only be the result of old acquaintance.

When dinner was announced, Lord Easton offered his arm to Mrs. Dunthorne; the parson walked off with Miss Easton; and the doctor had the honour of taking her ladyship.

Dr. Mallory was not his usual self, clearly. Yet he had no right to feel aggrieved, merely because the curate was an older friend of Miss Easton than himself. Why should he object to two young people, who had known one another since they were children, having a good deal to say to each other, and enjoying reminiscences in which a stranger had no part or share?

He was annoyed, nevertheless. Lady Easton seemed to him by no means an efficient substitute for Clare. Besides, he had come down to Drythorpe at some little inconvenience, in the hope of being of use to Miss Easton. He had no wish to play second fiddle to a giggling boy, whose familiarity with the family verged upon impudence.

Assuredly Dr. Mallory was not his better self on that night. At any other time he would have tossed aside all feelings of jealousy as being unworthy of him. But when a man is low in health, mole-hills grow into mountains; and when he is well again, he has to face the results.

On Sunday the Rev. Horace Dunthorne's sermon was the centre or attraction. On Monday the Rev. Horace Dunthorne's presence was indispensable during the consideration of the needs of the village hospital. On Monday evening the Rev. Horace Dunthorne dined again with the Eastons.

On Tuesday morning Dr. Mallory made his excuses, and returned to London.

On the following day, after having sat up all night with one of his patients, Dr. Mallory came to an end of his physical capacity. He returned to his lodgings with difficulty. He could scarcely turn the handle of the street door and let himself into the house; an overpowering weakness grew upon him; and he fainted.

An hour later he was found lying insensible on the stairs.

#### IV.

FOR many years Dr. Mallory had overworked himself. From the moment when he decided to study medicine, he had thrown himself heart and soul into his calling. He had always read with an indifference to physical conditions; for which liberty with Nature he was now being duly punished.

Dr. Mallory—like so many others—thought he knew to a nicety how far it was safe to strain the laws of health. An unexpected and unusual factor had been inserted in his life by the presence and

influence of Sister Clare; and the doctor, who had long sailed so close to the wind, was swamped (so to speak) by the squall.

Dr. Mallory's landlady discovered her lodger huddled at the foot of the stair. Borrowing, no doubt, from an imagination inspired by her own surroundings in life, she concluded that the worthy physician had dined on the previous night "not wisely, but too well." With the aid of a strong girl as intelligent as herself, she conveyed the doctor to his room, and laid him on his bed—to "come to" in due course.

In due course he came to, but in such a manner that the unhappy ravings of brain fever were mistaken for homicidal mania. Landlady and girl therefore fled the house incontinently, leaving the street door to shut of its own accord, and the doctor to take care of himself.

When the two fugitives had detailed the circumstances to a neighbour round the corner, they realised that further steps ought to be taken. They applied therefore for the aid of a policeman; and, accompanied by a burly constable, returned to their dwelling.

To their astonishment, the house was still standing. To their still greater astonishment, however, Dr. Mallory was being tended by a good-looking young lady in a nurse's costume. At her side stood the urchin Jack waiting for orders.

"This little lad," explained Sister Clare (of course it was she!)—"this little lad saw Dr. Mallory in the street, and feared he was ill; so he came and fetched me."

"No harm, miss, I'm sure," simpered the landlady.

"Why has your lodger been left in such a critical condition?" asked Sister Clare. "And what is the constable doing here?"

"Lor', miss! I never knew as the gentleman was critical. I thought he were a bit off his head. Can I do anything?"

Sister Clare did not then and there accept the offer of services. She dismissed the constable, who withdrew respectfully. She sent Jack for the physician who had lately helped Dr. Mallory. She then informed the landlady that the doctor was dangerously ill, and that she herself intended to remain and nurse him. The good woman was therefore requested to put up a bed for her in the sitting-room, immediately.

Dr. Mallory's escape from death was a narrow one. His recovery was entirely due to the faithful nursing of Sister Clare. At last the fever had run its course, and the wandering mind slowly regained its balance.

In more ways than one Sister Clare contributed to his recovery. Not only had her devoted nursing snatched him from the very brink of the grave; but her presence by his bedside, when he began to recover consciousness and reason, helped him more than all the drugs in the world.

For the first day or two after his return to his senses, Sister Clare played the tyrant; she would not allow him to make any effort or to indulge in unnecessary conversation.

One morning, when the early light of dawn crept in through the half-drawn curtains, Ernest Mallory partly awakened out of a sleep full of visions of his good angel. He had just dreamt how he confessed to Sister Clare the love for her which now possessed him, and how he offered her his life's devotion in return for her self-sacrificing care. Her reply, so the dream ran, pierced him to the heart; for she claimed that a poor pauper's doctor had no right to aspire to a peer's daughter. It was at this moment that his senses came nearer to earth; and, as he realised that he had been only dreaming, the sting of her supposed rejection of his love grew less painful. Nevertheless a resolution formed itself clearly in his mind, and forced itself desperately from his lips.

"I love you, Clare! I love you! But you must never know!"

Presently the morning sun mounted above the low mist upon the horizon, and its bright rays lighted up the sick man's room. The glory of awakening day stimulated energies which had for weeks lain exhausted, and Mallory felt an impulse to rise and sit up in bed. But something hindered him. It did not take him long to discover what it was.

Sister Clare sat beside his pillow, and her gentle eyes were looking eagerly into his. She smiled and spoke.

"Ernest."

Mallory, believing himself for the moment to be the victim of a dream, regarded her with a dazed expression. Had he not heard her call him by a more familiar title than is sanctioned by ordinary custom? Yes. Was he deceiving himself? No. Was he awake? Yes. It was fact, and no empty vision: she spoke again.

"Ernest!"

"Sister Clare!" he muttered in bewilderment.

"Let me be Sister Clare no more, but henceforth 'Clare,' and only 'Clare.'"

"I scarcely understand."

"Scarcely understand! Look into your heart. What do you find there, for me? What did you exclaim a little while ago?"

Mallory, wondering at her words, and hugging the delusion of his own irremediable unworthiness, answered her with the truth, and nothing but the truth—but not the whole truth.

"I find more in my heart than perhaps I have a right to say in your hearing—respect, admiration, heart-felt gratitude——" He paused.

"Is that all?" she asked.

"It is much," he pleaded evasively; and his eyes dropped before her questioning gaze.

"It is not enough," she complained; "not enough for me."

"What more can I give? What more do you ask?"

"Everything!"

"'Everything' is vague. I am in danger of misunderstanding. I might pain you greatly by saying all that is in my mind."

"You are wrong," she broke in, impressively. "To hide the truth is only to frame an error."

"Yet the truth must sometimes be hidden," he retorted gently, "for Duty's sake, if not for Delicacy."

"Well," she laughed, archly, "though you insist on misunderstanding me, for Duty's sake, I decline to submit, in the interests of Delicacy. Surely, neither is more admirable than Truth."

"What truth?" he inquired.

"That I love you, Ernest—as just now you said you loved me!"

Mallory shut his eyes and drew a quick breath. "Miss Easton—I beg—I must not listen—you have perhaps mistaken——"

"I do not think I have, Ernest. You love me—is it not so?—and you have rashly vowed never to tell me so."

"How do you know this?" he asked eagerly, while his whole face flushed with confusion at the thought of her having learnt his secret.

"Forgive me," she said; "I have played the eavesdropper here, while you have betrayed yourself in sleep—or out of sleep, I know not which. But you shall not rob yourself of happiness, to please Dame Duty; and I will not doom myself to single misery, to please Madam Delicacy. Ernest, I know that you love me!"

"And then?"

"I cannot live without your love."

"Clare!—dear Clare!—is this the truth?"

For answer, she first stooped and kissed the thin hand that lay in hers; then she added: "It is the whole truth."

For a minute Mallory seemed unable to awaken fully to his good fortune. When he did so, he wisely and unconditionally surrendered to necessity.

"You are right, Clare—my love—my darling! The error has brought me very low—the truth will save me."

He reached out his hands, and, taking her fair head in them, drew her to him till his lips met hers, and pent-up affection and life-long gratitude were expressed in the first kiss of true love.

\* \* \* \*

In the seclusion of the library at Drythorpe, Clare Easton, sitting at her father's knee, recounted how she had as good as "proposed", to Ernest Mallory.

"Pretty goings-on!" remarked the old lord, good-humouredly "Everything turns topsy-turvy nowadays. Your dear mother, Clare, would never have dreamt of proposing to me——" His daughter stopped him with a kiss and a laugh:

"What! daddy—not even in Leap Year?"



## ON READING "MASTERS OF THE WORLD."

WHAT would I, were the power mine,  
 Dost thou inquire, generous soul?  
 I'd range the world from pole to pole,  
 And learn of living life the whole,  
 Nor should the Present me confine.

For I would wander through the Past,  
 And know all men the world has known;  
 The Tyrant threatening on his throne,  
 The Thrall that at its base did groan;  
 I'd know all life from first to last.

Fair Baiae, loved of sea and sky,  
 I climb thy heights, I join the throng;  
 We bear the purple grapes along,  
 And, moving, chant a vintage song  
 To Bacchus—bounteous deity.

Or, with sweet Tertia all the day,  
 I mourn beside her perished Pasht;  
 Cruel the heavens from which it flash'd,  
 The vulture, and the claws which dash'd  
 Her playmate down and spoilt her play.

Ah! Pasht is gone and Tertia fled,  
 For hark! Great Piso loudly calls  
 Thrice on her name—from roof and walls  
 The name comes back; but Pluto's halls  
 Retain our Tertia: she is dead.

Great Piso—greater in thy death  
 Than in thy life, though that was great;  
 How grand the words thou spak'st of late,  
 In spite of seeming frowning fate,  
 "All, all is well," thy latest breath.

Thus, friend, though still my wish is vain,  
 It is, in sooth, not wholly so;  
 For, by thy gift I seem to know  
 The old-World Masters, and to grow  
 Familiar with their joy and pain.

JOHN JERVIS BERESFORD, M.A.



## THE INDIAN EMERALDS.

FOUNDED ON FACT.

## I.

NO house appears to good advantage in the fast-deepening twilight of a November day, but Elmbrook Court probably stands the test as well as any in England. It is one of the loveliest of the pretty half-timbered houses of which Worcestershire can boast a goodly show; and even under the dreariest circumstances, always looks hospitable and enticing. The exterior does not belie the interior, for the quaint, low, panelled sitting-rooms, with latticed windows and wide window-seats, are as delightful as one could imagine; and though the house does not possess the inevitable bedroom in which Charles I. once slept—if tradition is to be trusted, that unlucky monarch must have spent most of his time in a house-to-house visitation of his subjects—the upper storeys consist of charming rooms with quaint closets and recesses, and the landings all have fascinating windows. There are steps up and down everywhere, and no two rooms seem to visitors to be on the same level.

The present owner, Geoffrey Brooke, tenth owner of the name and house, was a gentle, unworldly man, as unlike the typical British Squire as possible—a man who had always left his property and money matters in the hands of his steward, with the result in his case of an annually decreasing income, and who was only occasionally roused from his antiquarian studies by the alarming growth and astounding demands of his eleven children. The family would have come to grief long since but for the practical common-sense and economy of his wife, one of the Worcestershire Guises, who inherited the true Gallic business capacities of her Huguenot ancestors, but whose devotion to the kitchen and dairy debarred her family from benefiting much by her society.

On a certain November evening the children of this ill-assorted couple were gathered round a blazing fire in the oak parlour, a splendid old room, whose floor, ceiling and walls are of rich black oak. Their unfailing subject of conversation—the declining state of the family position and finances—was under discussion, but with rather more detail than usual, for the benefit of their guest, the Honourable Frank Temple, who, however, seemed to find more enjoyment in looking at the charming face of Olivia, the eldest girl, than in listening to the diatribes of her brothers and sisters.

"Come, Olivia," said Geoffrey, "you needn't reprove us for being discontented; it's quite natural that we should feel being so pinched, and

having our position in the county lowered. It's very hard to see these upstarts, who made their money goodness knows how, taking our place. And I know you always feel not being able to go to the County Ball."

"Is the County Ball the goal of your earthly hopes and desires, Miss Brooke?" asked Mr. Temple.

"I used to think so, but I don't now; I've got past all that," laughed this mature maiden of twenty-three. "But I wish Amy and Alice and Helen could go. Somehow it's different from other balls."

"You know, Mr. Temple, all our family misfortunes date from a County Ball about a hundred and fifty years ago," said Amy, the romantic one of the family, who sometimes helped her father in his literary work, and had a large knowledge of family history. "And I always think if *we* could go to one, our luck might turn—it's certainly worth trying—don't you think so?"

"Decidedly," answered the young man. "But how came this by-gone ball to have such disastrous effects?"

"It's quite a romantic tale; a mystery in fact that's never been solved. Would you like to hear it? Perhaps you will be able to suggest some explanation of the matter. Jack, put some more wood on first, and, children, you must leave off scuffling or go into the nursery."

The little ones settled themselves on the hearth, and their elders having drawn up closer to the blaze, Amy began:

"The Brookes used to be wealthy and very important people in the county, and at one time there was a title in the family, but that, like other good things, has taken wing. The family jewels must have been splendid, judging by the inventories papa has in his possession. In particular, there was an emerald necklace and bracelets, worth a fabulous sum, which an Indian prince had given to a Captain Brooke, in the sixteenth century, for saving his life. These were prized more than anything else, and always belonged to the eldest daughter from her seventeenth birthday until she was married. She wore them for the wedding and then they were put by for her successor, so that they were never taken out of the direct family line, and there was a tradition that as long as the rule was faithfully observed, good fortune would attend the Brookes, and *vice versa*."

"About a hundred and fifty years ago—that would be in Queen Anne's reign—the head of the house was a Lord Brooke, a dreadful man, who was always card-playing and drinking. He had only one son and daughter, whom he neglected shamefully, and as his wife had long been dead, they naturally grew up headstrong and self-willed."

"Lady Olivia—there is always an Olivia in every generation—was a most lovely girl—have you noticed that portrait between the windows there, Mr. Temple, because she was the original of it? She was painted in the famous emeralds."

Mr. Temple replied that he had not, but would do so presently.

"Well, you know the portraits of a given period are always alike," the fair narrator resumed. "She was just a beauty of the Queen Anne period, and was very much admired and sought after. Perhaps we should not have known much about her life, but fortunately she kept a little diary for two or three years, which papa found in an old bureau. Poor Olivia must have had a miserable time, for her father was harsh with her, and though she seemed very fond of Gilbert, her brother, he soon began to follow in his father's footsteps. Lord Brooke had a friend almost his own age, Sir Marmaduke Ray, and when Olivia was twenty, this dreadful old fellow proposed to her. Of course she refused him, but he only laughed, and said he should have her no matter what she said, for her father had given his consent."

"A little head-strong," laughed Frank Temple.

"She had good cause," returned Amy.

"There is a pitiful account in the diary of the scene she had with her father; but the old wretch said it was quite true, he firmly intended her to marry Sir Marmaduke, and she ought to think herself fortunate to have the chance. Poor girl, it wasn't only that she hated old Sir Marmaduke, but she loved some one else, to whom, indeed, she was secretly engaged. Of course he was penniless, and only the son of the vicar at Hampton."

"And was she penniless also?" asked Mr. Temple.

"Why, no, she was a great heiress—hence all her trouble," returned Olivia. "Well, matters went on very miserably for a time. Sir Marmaduke was always coming here, but Olivia refused to acknowledge him as her lover. Her father and brother treated her abominably, and compelled her to be present at their card-parties, and they all used to get drunk and quarrel, until her life grew unbearable. She hadn't many chances of seeing Edgar Mence, but managed to meet him one day in the autumn, and told him she was certain her father meant the marriage to come off soon, but she would kill herself first. They talked it over, and decided that if the Earl did not bring matters to a crisis in the winter, she should try to bear it until the spring, when she would be of age; and then they could be married. She would be rich then, because she would have all her mother's immense fortune. So it was agreed, and Olivia went home comforted, while Edgar returned to Oxford, but he promised to come down for the County Ball on the first of December.

"A few days before the ball Lord Brooke told Olivia that she was to appear as the affianced bride of Sir Marmaduke, and the wedding would take place at Christmas. She implored her brother to save her, but he said he had no power in the matter; and there was no one else she could turn to. She had no means of sending her lover a letter without her father's knowledge, and so all her trouble was confided to her diary, and in the three last days before the ball she wrote many pages. It is very interesting, but terribly touching; I

couldn't read it aloud to save my life. But it is evident from the very last entry, written just before she dressed for the ball, that she intended to run away with Edgar that night if they could elude her father's eye. All that we know after that is tradition, or what we found in a few old letters, so that I can't give you much detail."

"I think we are having quite enough detail as it is," struck in Geoffrey, ungallantly.

"Well, they all went to the ball," continued Amy, passing over the interruption. "Edgar was there, and I'm afraid Olivia behaved very rashly, considering the nature of the men whose hands she was in, for she danced many times with Edgar, and treated Sir Marmaduke with marked indifference; but whether she entered upon their plan of eloping no one knows for certain. The coachman and footmen said afterwards that Olivia got into the family coach with her father and brother, and that Sir Marmaduke spoke to her through the window before mounting his horse to ride home to Kempsey, which is on the other side of Worcester; and then they rattled home here to Elmbrook. It was about two o'clock when they arrived, and the house servants had gone to bed, after preparing supper as usual in this very room. The footmen said the two gentlemen had both taken too much and were very abusive; and they saw Lady Olivia in her dark-hooded cloak run across the hall to go up-stairs, but the Earl pulled her back; and he and Gilbert dragged her into this room and shut the door. After that the men saw no more, as they had to go to the stables. And whether their tale is true or not no one has ever seen Lady Olivia since; at least, no one has owned to it. She and the emeralds disappeared that night as completely as if they had dissolved.

"And from that time the fortunes of the Brookes have steadily declined. Gilbert was killed in a duel soon after, and, when the Earl died, after a most miserable old age, the property passed to another branch of the family, and though there have been a variety of Brookes since then, good, bad and indifferent, with large families and small, they seem to have been more or less under a curse ever since. Their enterprises are generally unsuccessful, banks they are in fail, their ricks take fire, their cattle have the plague, their children take all the prevalent epidemics and many of them die by accident. Two of our uncles died violent deaths, and we had two little sisters drowned. For my part I firmly believe what the old housekeeper said when she was dying, that until poor Olivia's body had Christian burial, and the jewels were restored to the family, misfortune would be the lot of the Brookes."

And Amy, having finished her story, lay back in her chair with a despondent sigh.

"Thank you very much," said Frank Temple. "I have enjoyed the story, and would gladly assist at Lady Olivia's obsequies, if we could only find her bones—for I don't suppose there is much else left

after a hundred and fifty years. But surely this room is haunted, or her ghost walks the ancestral domains somewhere?"

"I don't know about that," said Amy; "we've never seen it ourselves, nor heard of it, but this room was never used again during her father's lifetime. But what is your explanation of the mystery?"

"I'm afraid the detective business isn't much in my line," laughed Frank Temple, "especially with such slender clues for guidance; but I should say she escaped out of the house to waylay Edgar on his return to Oxford, and was accidentally drowned."

"That's very far-fetched," returned Amy; "mere supposition. We feel sure she was murdered." And she gave an effective little shiver as she spoke.

"Oh, look at the moon!" cried one of the little girls; "isn't it bright?"

They all looked up and saw the setting crescent shining through the mist of the November night.

"Why, we forgot to close the shutters," said Olivia; "how dreary to sit here with those bare windows behind us. We shall have ghosts looking upon us."

"Rubbish to ghosts and murders," cried Geoffrey. "Amy, you've always some thrilling story on hand. But I'm glad its clearing up, Temple; we shall be able to go out with the ferrets after dinner now."

Just then the arrival of nurse for the children, and the sound of the dressing-bell, broke up the cosy party in the oak parlour.

## II.

NOT until Christmas Eve was there another gathering round the fire in the oak parlour. A sharp attack of congestion of the lungs, entailing five weeks in his bedroom was the result of that evening's ferreting for Geoffrey Brooke; and though Frank Temple paid less dearly for his sport, a heavy cold kept him a prisoner—(a very willing one, it must be confessed)—at the Court, far beyond his intended stay. When well enough to leave, he gladly yielded to the request that he should prolong his visit beyond Christmas, in order that he might help to amuse the invalid, who, like most men unaccustomed to sickness, led his family a lively dance during his convalescence. Even affectionate, patient Olivia, on whom most of the nursing devolved, found her forbearance and skill taxed to the utmost, and heartily appreciated the help afforded by their guest. While he, on his side, found his services amply rewarded by the society of the head nurse, and it was not long before the admiration and liking he had always felt for her, deepened into an all-absorbing passion as he realised the hidden beauty of her disposition.

Happily the worst was over in time for them to look forward to an unbroken circle round the festive board on Christmas Day; and on

Christmas Eve Geoffrey's couch was drawn up in front of a splendid fire of pine-knots, and his sisters and brothers and the devoted Frank gathered round it, in order that they might once more feast their eyes on the handsome face, for Geoffrey, in spite of his overbearing ways, was the idol of the family.

The gentle old Squire, with a heavy burden rolled off his heart, went back to pore over his beloved tomes, and Mrs. Brooke, after placing a tableful of invalid dishes within reach, returned to the culinary preparations for the morrow, and the young people were left to themselves.

"It is more than six weeks since we all sat here together," said Alice.

"Yes, we didn't think then that we were on the verge of another of the inevitable Brooke misfortunes," returned Amy; "but I'm prepared for anything now."

"The best thing we can do is to set about finding that necklace," said Mr. Temple, "before your views of life become any blacker than they are already, Miss Amy."

"I wish we could," she answered. "I firmly believe it's hidden somewhere in the house; and we should know it again by the portrait, whatever condition it was in."

"Are we going to put up any holly here?" said Helen, whose thoughts were always flying off at a tangent.

"Yes, we'll have a little," answered Olivia. "Jack, fetch some out of the hall and help the girls to put it up."

Jack brought in a huge bough of holly, some ivy wreaths and a hammer.

"Jack, it's no use bringing that hammer; you know papa won't allow any nails to be driven in this room."

"Oh, bother! As if two or three little ones would hurt! We might as well have no holly if it's only to be skied on those fusty old pictures. I want to hang a bit of ivy and mistletoe on that panel on the other side of the fireplace; it looks so bare with nothing to correspond to the clock here."

Knowing that remonstrance was useless, Olivia let Jack select his wreaths and squeeze behind the settee to fix them on the desired spot.

"Now, girls," he began, sketching a design on the wall with his finger, "now do you think that will do? It won't hurt if I stick a little nail here and here"—and he rapped the wall with his hammer in a few places. "I say," he cried suddenly, "doesn't this sound different to you—here—and here? We are on the eve of a thrilling discovery; the long-hidden secret is about to be revealed. Here is the proverbial closet containing the proverbial skeleton, the only thing wanting is a keyhole and key. Now, Amy, turn your antiquarian lore to practical use for once, and show us how the ancients used to open panel cupboards." And the orator commenced a devil's tattoo with his hammer,



"I wish you'd stop that row," said the invalid, irritably; "if you are going to drive any nails in, just be quick about it, and then come out and be quiet."

"All right. Light the lamp, Olive, and then I shall only be a minute or two," said the irrepressible Jack, and with the aid of a light he soon had the ivy arranged to his satisfaction.

As he moved away, Mr. Temple took the hammer from him, saying:

"One moment, Geoffrey; I agree with Jack that this part of the wall does sound rather different from the others;" and he struck a smart blow on the bevelled part of the panel, about five feet from the ground. There was a singular click, followed by the snap of a spring. The girls gave a shriek and the boys a shout, then Jack exclaimed:

"Didn't I tell you? I knew there was a cupboard there."

"Calm yourself," said Geoffrey; "it is probably nothing but a place for cleaning the chimney."

"Come here, Jack," said Mr. Temple, "and when I strike, push the panel with all your strength." Jack was quite ready, and the instant the hammer touched the magic spot, flung himself against the wall. There was the curious grating sound of rusty hinges trying to act, the panel slowly receded a few inches on one side, and then stuck.

The girls rushed to the corner, and the children danced wildly round the room without any clear idea of what was happening; Spot and Nero barked, and even the supercilious Geoffrey sat up and shared the general excitement.

"The hinges want oiling. Alf, fetch the oil-can."

Never had the indolent Alfred obeyed an order with such alacrity.

"Pfff!" cried Jack, anointing the rusty iron; "there is a most musty odour in the den, whatever else may be there. I should think the evil deeds of a hundred Brookes are bottled up here."

By means of oiling and working the door backwards and forwards, the hinges at last yielded, and the heavy oaken panel stood wide open, making a doorway about five feet high and three wide. Before the eyes of the excited group was a vaulted closet, but the cloud of dust that arose on Jack's stepping in prevented them at first from seeing anything of its size or contents.

When this had settled a little, Mr. Temple held up the lamp so that its light was shed over the whole chamber except that part behind the open door. It was about six feet wide and ten long, running the whole distance from the fireplace to the outside wall of the house.

"What a disappointment!" cried Helen, for a couple of rusty iron boxes, and a pile of mouldy books seemed to be the sole contents of the secret chamber.

"Did you expect it to be full of bags of gold, diamonds and pearls?" asked Alfred.

"What's that behind the door, Jack?" said Mr. Temple, entering with the lamp. They stepped beyond the door, which concealed a third of the closet, and then a horrified shout from both young men sent a thrill and shock through the expectant watchers in the parlour.

"Lady Olivia!" cried Jack; "emeralds and all!" Before Frank Temple could prevent them, the whole party except Olivia and the two little ones had rushed into the closet, and the long-hidden mystery of Lady Olivia Brooke's disappearance lay revealed before them.

Partly supported on an oak chest, and partly propped against the corner of the walls, was a skeleton about the average height of women, and on the chest and floor around it were mouldering heaps of rags, some of which fell to pieces on being touched, while others still retained the crispness, and in some instances showed the pattern of eighteenth-century brocade. Any doubt that might have existed as to the identity of the skeleton was set at rest by the ghastly fact of its still wearing the Indian emerald necklace. Though the jewellery was discoloured and covered with dust, the young Brookes recognised it instantly by the peculiar design of the setting, with which the portrait had always made them familiar. Scattered about the floor lay bracelets and other jewels.

Meanwhile Olivia had hurried the youngsters into the nursery, and summoned her parents. Though he had no taste for horrors and mystery, the old gentleman's antiquarian instincts were all on the alert, and he was soon on the spot. Knowing what they all did of the poor young heiress's story, it was not difficult to form what, there is no doubt, was the true theory respecting her end.

The men-servants were evidently correct in saying that the Earl and Gilbert forced her into the parlour with them when they returned from the ball; and inflamed with wine and anger had probably sought to terrify the defenceless girl into compliance. But she was not a Brooke for nothing, and her spirit was as haughty and stubborn as their own, and though no one would accuse them of deliberately murdering the unfortunate girl, it can be easily understood that Olivia's defiance would enrage the brutality of her natural protectors until they raised their hands against her; and everyone knows how often a hasty blow struck in anger has had fatal results.

Evidently no blood was shed, or traces of it would have been found next morning, for it is not easily got rid of. Terror has a very sobering effect; and, alarmed and horrified at what they had done, Lord Brooke and his son must have carried their victim into the wall-closet (the secret of which was probably known only to themselves), and placed her in the position in which she was found, and then concocted a tale to account for her disappearance.

It is not likely that they intended to leave the body in the closet, but their probable intention of burying it at a favourable opportunity was frustrated by Gilbert's death. No wonder the old Earl never

dared to venture into the oak parlour again, and finding no suspicion attached to the place, doubtless congratulated himself on the security of his victim's tomb, which had remained intact for a hundred and fifty years.

The Squire would not allow the closet to be disturbed in any way until he had consulted the rector; and he and the worthy old gentleman—they were both magistrates—having decided that an inquest was unnecessary, the panel door was closed again until two days after Christmas, when all that remained of the once blooming Olivia Brooke was quietly laid to rest in the ancestral grave.

The rector, in virtue of his combined spiritual and worldly authority, himself removed the Indian Prince's gift, and when the bones were lifted from the chest into the coffin, an irrefragable proof of the Earl's guilt was brought to light. In the folds of a remnant of the brocaded ball dress, was a signet ring, engraved with his monogram and crest, and the date of his coming of age. There it lay, as it must have fallen from his finger. The iron boxes and chest did not contain much that was of pecuniary value, beyond some quaint old silver and jewellery, but they held what was of infinitely greater worth in the eyes of the unworldly old Squire—a quantity of seventeenth-century letters and documents that were just what he wanted for the completion of his "*History of the Brooke Family*;" the studying and editing of which gave him happy employment for the rest of his life.

The emeralds were sent to Birmingham to be cleaned and furbished up, but the good taste of the family forbade any alteration in the setting; and when they came back to the Court, they were the envy and admiration of all beholders. Of course they fell to the lot of Olivia, for the time being, but the tender-hearted girl could never be prevailed on to wear them. And, indeed, she had not many opportunities; for before another county ball had taken place, she was the Honourable Mrs. Francis Temple, and her Christmas was spent in Florence.

The luck of the Brookes certainly turned after that memorable Christmas Eve, but we suspect it was hardly so much owing to the fulfilling of the prophecy, as to Geoffrey's assuming the care of the estate, and, backed by the advice and money of his brother-in-law, to his clever management thereof.

The girls all married well, though it was always a bitter potion that none of them were ever allowed to wear the emeralds; and it was not until last year, when Geoffrey's seventeen-year-old daughter Olivia made her *début*, that the Indian jewels again adorned the neck and arms of a Brooke.

SHIRLEY CREWE.

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## A MISUNDERSTANDING.

THERE came a shadow between them  
 Like a mist-wreath white and thin,  
 A door had been left unguarded,  
 And the evil doubt crept in.

Like the breath of some baleful fever,  
 Like a blight in the summer air,  
 It darken'd the beautiful palace  
 Which love had made so fair.

Two that had journey'd together  
 Now parted sore afraid,  
 And ever the gloom grew deeper  
 That the cruel shadow had made.

"Alas! and could he have said it?"  
 One cried in her angry pain—  
 And "Alas! and could she believe it?"  
 Came back like a sad refrain.

Till at last one said, "I will trust him,  
 I have done him a bitter wrong,  
 That I question'd even a moment  
 The friend I have tried so long."

And the other said, "I will seek her,  
 'Tis surely some ill surmise;  
 I shall know if her faith has failed her  
 By a single look in her eyes."

Once more they stood together—  
 The two that should yet be one—  
 But the shadow melted before them  
 As a mist-wreath flees the sun.

"Forgive me," he said, "I will tell you.  
 'Twas a story writ in sand;"

"Nay, forgive me," she sobbed; "but I trust you,  
 And I care not to understand."

And the house was full of the sunlight,  
 For the shadow dark and drear  
 Fell dead in the shining presence  
 Of the love that casts out fear.

CHRISTIAN BURKE.

